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Mère Marie Eugénie de Jésus

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THE LIFE OF MÈRE MARIE EUGÉNIE MILLERET DE BROU

Foundress of the Assumption Nuns

BY

ALICE LADY LOVAT

With a Preface by

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE,

Archbishop of Westminster

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PREFACE

The number of teaching Institutes or Congregations with which the generous Providence of God has endowed the Church during the last century is difficult to tell. Yet it can hardly be said that even one is useless or unnecessary, though its utility may be of only a local or restricted character. But there are some among them so widely spread, so fruitful in result, so constant in activity, that their presence in our educational work is vitally important, while their absence or disappearance would be calamitous.

No two of these greater Institutes are alike, though their essential purpose must be the same. Filled with the faith and teaching of the Church, consecrated by vow to the training of the young so as to bring them closely under the influence of Jesus Christ our Master, they have but one ultimate end in view. But in detail of daily life, in insistence on some one characteristic of the following of Christ, in methods and systems of teaching, above all in the very real but intangible and indefinable element which we call atmosphere, one society differs from any other in remarkable and unmistakable fashion, while all the houses of the same society have a family likeness which is recognised at first sight.

Whence comes the difference, and the likeness? To a very great extent from the personality of the Founder or the Foundress. It is especially for this reason that I welcome the Life, in English, of *Eugénie*

Milleret de Brou ; for the knowledge of her life is necessary if we are to know accurately and judge rightly the wide-spread Congregation of the Assumption, which possesses, as all its members and friends will testify, its own marked individuality in the spirit of its subjects, in the trend of education of its pupils, and in its power of winning and holding their lasting affection. The life of the Foundress makes clear to us the sources of this individuality ; and the way in which the Creator, by the natural and supernatural qualities bestowed upon her, and the contact with other souls whose lives moved side by side with hers—sometimes helping, sometimes thwarting, always moulding it—fitted her to be the originator and organizer of a new and powerful force in the educational work of the Church.

Having known and appreciated the Sisters of the Assumption both as Bishop of Southwark and as Archbishop of Westminster, I am glad to write these few words of introduction to the life of their holy and venerated Foundress, and to bear my testimony to the solid value of the work which they are doing so earnestly in our midst. May God bless them in their varied occupations, public or very hidden as they may be ; and may He lead them to walk with courage and constancy in the footsteps of the great-souled lady, through whose inspiration, teaching and traditions He has called them to His special service.

FRANCIS CARDINAL BOURNE,
Archbishop of Westminster.

July 22nd, 1925.

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EUGÉNIE MILLERET DE BROU

CHAPTER I

Eugénie Milleret de Brou, Foundress of the Congregation of the Assumption, was born at Metz on 25th August 1817. Though a French woman by birth and strongly attached to her native country by links of affection and association, she bore in her veins a strain of Italian blood: her father being descended from a famous "free lance" or condottiere of the name of Miglioretti who gave his services to François I and was rewarded by him with a patent of nobility. Eugénie's grandfather was appointed Receiver General to the Forces by the French Republic in 1795. After the taking of Luxemburg by the Republican army he made it his headquarters, and it was there that his eldest son Jacques became acquainted with the orphan daughter of Baron de Brou [1] who had been a General in the Austrian army. Presumably his courtship was a short one as we learn that he was twenty-one and his bride only sixteen years of age at the time of their marriage. They had five children, three sons and two daughters; Eugénie, the elder of the two daughters, came in succession to her two brothers. Before pursuing her history any further it would be as well to cast a glance at the state of religion in France at the time of her birth.

Twenty-three years had elapsed since the counter-revolution of 9th Thermidor 1794 and the execution

[1] Philippe Joseph de Brou, whose family originated in Artois, but had settled in Hainaut since the 14th century. He married Eleonore Charlotte Bosquet at Brussels in 1774.

of Robespierre had put an end to the Reign of Terror. Prisons were thrown open, the guillotine was no longer in daily requisition, a general amnesty had been proclaimed ; and if a sense of peace and security did not immediately follow, there were signs at least that the nation at large had had enough of scenes of bloodshed and revenge. But, as after a great storm at sea, though the wind may have dropped and the skies cleared, yet huge rollers continue to break with a dull roar on the beach, in the same way the anti-religious fury let loose by the Revolution had not by any means spent itself, though a truce had been proclaimed and France was again governed by a Bourbon king.

Napoleon, when he came into power, was sufficiently clear-sighted to perceive that the maintenance of religion was necessary for the stability of France. He also went so far as to acknowledge that the Catholic religion was that of the majority of Frenchmen. In his Concordat of 1802 therefore, which was finally accepted by Pope Pius VII, though not without a vigorous protest, he made some concessions with a view of satisfying the consciences of his subjects and making peace with the Holy See.

The Catholic Church, from the time she emerged from the catacombs, has been guided by certain principles. She has ever demanded liberty for the exercise of her powers and for the appointment of her ministers, and for dealing with the education of youth ; also she has insisted on receiving an adequate support from the faithful entrusted to her charge. The Concordat conceded the first point. With regard to the second, the Government claimed the right to present bishops, though the Holy See was permitted to give them canonical institution. No concessions worthy of the name were made on the third point, and education in France remained in bonds till the " Loi Falloux ", passed in 1850, gave the Church some

measure of liberty. On the fourth point, that of temporalities, the Holy See allowed holders of ecclesiastical property confiscated during the Revolution to retain possession, and the Government, in return, undertook to make suitable provision for bishops and parish priests.

Such was the Concordat in its main features. But its promulgation was followed immediately by additions known as the Organic Articles, which, though upheld by succeeding French Governments, were never accepted by Rome, and were ever after the cause of continual friction between France and the Holy See. In the year 1817, a Concordat was agreed upon between Louis XVIII and Pius VII which aimed at abolishing the Organic Articles, re-establishing the bishoprics suppressed by Napoleon, and returning to the Concordat of 1516. But it met with widespread opposition; and Louis, not being of the stuff of which martyrs are made, it remained a dead letter.

The politico-religious outlook in 1817, the year of Eugénie Milleret's birth, was of the gloomiest. The churches, though open, were empty. All outward manifestation of devotional cult had to be sedulously avoided for fear of evoking passions which though dormant, were not dead. So careful was it found necessary to be to avoid rousing anti-Catholic prejudice, that the communities of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart for many years after its institution were known to the public as *Dames de la Foi*, or *de l'Instruction Chrétienne*. Montalembert tells us in his *Monks of the West* that the first time he saw a monk's habit was on the boards of a theatre; and so late as in the year 1843, Lacordaire was ordered by his eccleciastic superiors to put a surplice over his habit when preaching from the pulpit of Notre-Dame. In short the Church was still in hiding. But have such trials, in every time and under every sky, ever been wanting to her? Should we not be prepared to expect them from the words addressed by her Divine

Head to His disciples at the Last Supper? Has she not—in the words of a great poet:—

> "Oft been chased with horns and hounds
> And Scythian shafts; and many winged wounds
> Aimed at her heart, was often forced to fly,
> And doomed to death though fated not to die."

Even at the very time of which we are writing there were signs that the blood of the martyrs, the heroic bishops and priests and nuns who had laid down their lives rather than take the oath exacted from them by an infidel Government, was bearing its fruit. To mention by name all the great and distinguished ecclesiastics and laymen who, born at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries contributed to the revival of religion in France in the course of the latter century, would detain us too long. We cannot omit, however, a passing glance at a few of the greatest, many of whom came into personal contact with Mother Marie Eugénie, and were her fellow-workers in the revival of Christian education. Foremost amongst these stands the name of Mgr. Affre, Archbishop of Paris of whom it can be truly said that following in the footsteps of his Master, he laid down his life for his flock.

Scarcely less distinguished for their services in the cause of religion were those great writers who fought for the same cause with their pen: such as Mgr. Gerbet, Bishop of Perpignan of whom Sainte-Beuve said that "certain passages of his writings are amongst the most beautiful and *suave* pages that ever honoured religious literature"; Mgr. Gay, another brilliant writer; Dom Guéranger, Lacordaire, the great preacher and restorer of the Dominican Order in France; those great converts from Judaism the brothers Ratisbonne; Dupanloup, Ravignan, Mermillod—for these also were contemporaries of Mother Marie Eugénie. Nor should we omit from our list

the names of Montalembert, Frederic Ozanam, Veuillot, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, the de la Ferronays family—all of whom in their various ways, by their eloquence in Parliament, the charm of their pen or their high character and personal influence, contributed to the Christianization of France in the first half of the nineteenth century.

There is one name which can never be omitted in any glance, however superficial, at the state of France —the eldest daughter of the Church—at this period of her history: it is that of the Blessed Jean-Baptiste Vianney, Curé d'Ars. This great saint may be said to have done more by the wholly supernatural character of his life, as shown by his austerities, his teachings in the confessional and the pulpit and the miracles he wrought, to bring back his country to the ideals put before us by the Gospels than any single man of his generation. During the forty-four years in which he exercised his sacred ministry at Ars, that obscure village became a centre of piety and a place of pilgrimage to numbers who aspired to a higher life, a closer union with God, or whose consciences were ill at ease or vocations in doubt. And how many who went to scoff or out of idle curiosity, dated from the sight of the holy priest and a few words from his lips, a renewal of their faith and a change in their lives! Ars, whilst the Blessed Jean-Baptiste lived, was in truth a power-station diffusing grace and piety over the whole of France and beyond its borders.

France also owes a debt of gratitude to Dupont, better known as "the holy man of Tours" who, by his great gifts of faith and piety and by spreading devotion to the Holy Face, brought innumerable blessings on his country.

And to this tale of great men we must add the names of those other devoted workers in the Master's vineyard: the Founders of Congregations of women.

Blessed Julie Billart had gone to her reward some years before the birth of Mother Marie Eugénie, but her great work for education, though it was then firmly rooted, was putting out fresh offshoots, as it is still doing, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. The Venerable Madeleine Barat, the Foundress of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart, then in the full plentitude of her powers, was working with no less fruit to the same ends. We have just kept the centenary of the Foundation of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith which owed its inception to the piety and zeal of Pauline Jaricot. The Founders of the Congregation of the Helpers of the Holy Souls and of Marie-Réparatrice were also contemporaries of Mother Eugénie; and in both cases their work, though it originated in France and was the work of Frenchwomen, spread to other countries and became ultimately cosmopolitan in character.

If we extend our outlook to the world outside the cloister and the pulpit, we shall see that the leaven "hidden in the three measures of meal" was beginning to work. True that the revival of faith in Christian dogmas and in the Church's past and future did not always take a strictly orthodox channel. Such writers as Chateaubriand and Lamartine, whose works may be looked upon as the aftermath of the Romantic school of J. J. Rousseau, could scarcely be said to represent the mind of the Church. Still they testified to the fact that she was still a living force and that poetry and art when emptied of her traditions in the past, her energising power at all times in everything concerning man's welfare, of the romance of her history and that of the lives of her saints, were little but a name.

Many, however, were the rocks ahead. And not the least of them was the attitude of aloofness which the Church of France had maintained for so long towards the Holy See and which was a continual and ever-recurring source of danger to her.

"Enlightened minds were not wanting who realised that the hope of the Church in France lay in a closer union with Rome. Conspicuous among these were the brothers de Lamennais, Montalembert, Lacordaire and their followers. The condemnation of certain of their views as expressed in *l'Avenir* broke up the so-called *Ecole Menaisienne* in its political aspect, but the very dispersal of its members carried its Catholic and Roman ideas into many fields of action. Thus we can trace back to this early movement such works as the inauguration of the conferences of Notre-Dame by Lacordaire, Ozanam's foundation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the creation of Catholic journalism by Louis Veuillot, the restoration of the Roman liturgy in France through the influence of Dom Guéranger, the campaign for the freedom of teaching carried on with varied success throughout the century. The great Religious Orders, Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominican—and the Jesuits—returned to exert anew their saving influence. Many would have said, as Lacordaire said of the Rule of St Dominic 'there is nothing newer, nothing better adapted to our own time and our own wants'. But whilst we continue to say with the great Dominican 'the grace of being the Founder of an Order is the highest and rarest God grants to His saints', we must claim this grace for many at this time, and among them the subject of this biography, Mère Marie Eugénie de Jésus."

CHAPTER II

"For with Thee is the fountain of life and in Thy light we shall see light." (Psalm xxxi.)

Soon after Eugénie's birth her family moved to Preisch, a property belonging to her father in the neighbourhood of Luxemburg; and here she was baptized on 6th October 1817. It was in this country house, situated in a charming landscape with a view of lake and river, and woods and meadows extending as far as the eye could reach, that Eugénie's childhood was passed. Though M. Milleret's profession of Receiver-General of the province of Luxemburg necessitated his presence at frequent intervals at Metz, his family, apparently, made Preisch their headquarters. It was accordingly Eugénie's home till she was twelve years old. In later life she often referred to the happy days of her childhood. She owed to the scenes in which it was passed a keen love of the beauties of nature, and a vivid perception, which she ever afterwards retained, of the influence which a healthy life spent in such surroundings has on the character. "Such a bringing up" she said on one occasion, "has the effect of strengthening the character, making it less impressionable, and better prepared for the serious duties of life; and physically, more able to stand the strain of severe studies. In these days the minds of children are too often forced in order to make little prodigies of them at eight years of age, whereby they are losers intellectually, and their moral development suffers."

Eugénie's brother Louis was her companion in those days. He was nearest to her in age, for her sister died when only eleven months old, and as Louis

Château of Preisch.

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was her elder by two years, her habits and tastes were doubtless modelled on his, which were those of other boys of his age. It is not surprising therefore to hear, as she told her Sisters later, that she had never cared for playing with dolls. She and her brother spent their time happily in roaming, with two dogs for their companions, in the woods and meadows which surrounded their home. Eugénie seems to have possessed a gift which is inborn in some people of taming wild animals, as we are told that she tamed a little roe-deer, a denizen of the woods, so successfully that it would come and feed out of her hand. Of religious teaching she seems to have had little enough in those early days. Her father and mother were both products of their age, the age of the Encyclopedists—in which a smattering of philosophy and science stood for solid learning and knowledge, and which looked upon anything like authority in Christian dogma as an exploded idea born of days when the intellect was still in leading-strings. Like many of their contemporaries, however, they professed an outward respect for religion, looking upon it as a safeguard to morals in the young and the ignorant. In spite of her religious indifference (and we may add ignorance) Mme Milleret was a good and charitable woman. Her mornings at Preisch were constantly spent in visiting the sick and poor in the neighbouring villages, in attending to their wants and supplying them with all they required in their necessities. She inculcated this habit by word and example so successfully on her children, that to accompany her on her errands of charity was looked upon by them as a treat only given in reward for good behaviour. Probably medical aid in those days was not easily procured, and when procured not very efficient, so that we are told she was in great request as a physician in cases of illness in the neighbourhood. On one occasion a serious accident occurred at Preisch to seven men who fell off the roof and who were all injured, some very

severely. Mme Milleret at once rose to the occasion, bound up their wounds and, though she owned to having been prostrate afterwards in consequence of the shock and her exertions, she did not slacken her efforts till she had done all that was possible for their cure or the alleviation of their sufferings. Eugénie was twelve years old when she made her first Communion. Referring to those days many years later in a letter to the great Dominican, Father Lacordaire, she wrote: "My ignorance of the dogmas and teachings of the Church at that time was almost inconceivable, and yet I had attended a Catechism class with the other children of my age; I made my first Communion, however, devoutly, and the graces God then gave me I have looked upon, together with your words, as the foundation-stones of my salvation." Of these graces she spoke later in greater detail to her daughters of the Assumption:

"When I made my first Communion," she said, "I was strongly moved by the thought of God's greatness and my extreme littleness. The impression made upon me was such that everything around me seemed to vanish; I no longer saw anything; it appeared to me as if I were transported—I in my littleness seemed to be borne before the throne of God in order to render Him by means of Him whom I had just received, a homage which I was incapable of giving Him myself. The impression lasted a very short time, but I have never forgotten it. I remember also that in returning from the altar rails I was much alarmed at having to pass through the choir in the midst of the Canons, and I wondered how I should be able to rejoin my mother in the crowd, and I heard a voice within me saying 'You will lose your mother, but I shall be to you more than a mother. The day will come when you will take leave of all you love, in order to glorify Me and serve the Church about which as yet you know nothing.'"

Soon after Eugénie had made her first Communion she was sent to a school at Metz where she remained for two years. Either the teaching at this school was particularly good or the scholar was a particularly apt one, but unquestionably she laid there the foundations of a thoroughly sound education which proved of the greatest use to her later. To the lessons of arithmetic she received there she attributed the great facility she had in mental arithmetic; and she used to mention afterwards with approval the pains that were taken at this school to form a good literary style in the pupils. They were taught also to read with expression and discrimination, and to grasp the meaning of great writers, and the beauty of thought or diction displayed by them. She used often afterwards to say that "one of the characteristics of a woman of refinement and cultivation is to be able to express herself well in speaking and writing. A knowledge of chemistry and algebra in no way contributes to this result." These words are not without their application in the present day, when it is far from uncommon to hear a woman express herself in slipshod English or French, as the case may be, who has yet passed examinations successfully in more than one of the arts and sciences.

The year 1831, when Eugénie, had only attained her fourteenth year, was a disastrous one for her and her family. In the first place she was taken ill of typhoid fever whilst at school; and when she had recovered sufficiently to return home, the doctors condemned her to absolute rest of mind and body. Forbidden to study, Eugénie utilized this enforced idleness, her biographer tells us, by reading. She was very fond of poetry, and her favourite author was Schiller: she was as familiar with the literature of the German language as with her own.

Many years afterwards, when presiding at the examinations of the convent pupils, she was able to

prompt those who hesitated, or broke down, in repeating passages from *William Tell* or the *Maid of Orleans*—a striking proof of the retentiveness of her memory. She also read and enjoyed a translation of Homer's *Iliad*.

In course of time Eugénie recovered her health, but an event took place in the same year which was to change the whole course of her life, which had hitherto run in such a peaceful channel, and was to substitute sad and hard facts for poetic dreams and studies. M. Milleret, by an unlucky speculation, found himself in much reduced circumstances. The result was that the property of Preisch had to be sold, the house in Metz given up, and he and his wife and family—the latter now only three in number—moved to Paris and settled down in a small flat there. Misfortunes seldom come singly, and this blow was followed by a still greater one. Mme Milleret was taken ill in the summer of 1832 with cholera and died of that complaint after only three hours' illness. So sudden was the attack that none of those who were present at her bedside thought of fetching a priest; she died accordingly as she had lived, deprived of religious consolations. Eugénie felt her mother's death deeply, not only on account of the personal loss, but because she reproached herself with having made no effort to procure for her the last Sacraments in her dying moments. We find traces of this great sorrow in her correspondence many years later with M. Combalot. She writes thus to him on the 14th of July 1837: "I suffered much on revisiting Metz; I had not been there since the last journey I took with my mother. In those last days of her life, when she seemed to have a presentiment of the death which awaited her in Paris, she gave me some advice dictated by her love of me—putting me on my guard against the temptations by which she knew I should be surrounded, and showing marks of affection in her manner to me,

which touched me all the more because she had accustomed me to treat her with greater respect than tenderness. My mother thought that demonstrations of fondness excited the imagination at the cost of weakening the character. She dreaded for me anything that tended towards sentimentality; and the strength of her mind and character made her look down on the caressing ways by which an affection less profound that hers usually reveals itself. But to me, who was so much weaker than she was, no recollections were dearer than of those moments when she relaxed her dignity and reserve, and appeared to find consolation and help in me."

Writing to the same correspondent on 9th August 1840, when the rule of enclosure was about to be put in force by the newly formed Congregation of the Assumption, she says: "Yesterday's date imposed the duty on me of a last pilgrimage to Montmartre to my mother's grave which I shall soon no longer be able to revisit. It was the anniversary of a death which was full of anguish for me; and it was a sad one for her also, for never shall I cease to reproach myself for not having surrounded her with all the consolations afforded by our faith. In those days I was young and so ignorant of that which alone constitutes our riches. For which reason I trust our Lord in His infinite mercy will have deigned to pardon me my fault and will have repaired its consequences as they affected my poor mother. I cannot describe to you what a feeling of confidence came over me yesterday. It appeared to me that God did not reject my prayers nor, more especially, the prayers of my Sisters in religion who united theirs with so much affection to mine." She ends her letter by saying: "May our Lord do with us what He will; may He give to us or take away from us! In what He gives us we shall see a proof of His goodness, and we shall find another in what He deprives us of, for He will never take away

anything from us without giving Himself to us more fully in its place."

M. Milleret thinking his daughter doubtless too young to take charge of his house, confided her to the care of a friend of his mother's who undertook to bring her up with her own family. Mme Doulcet was the wife of a high Government official; and as she was both wealthy and fond of society, Eugénie found herself ere long swimming in a stream which was taking her she knew not whither. Though only sixteen, she had the appearance of being older; and her beautiful black eyes, charming smile, and attractive manners made her the object of general attention to the gay crowd who frequented Mme Doulcet's salon. The dangers which threatened her did not come, however, from gratified vanity but from conversations in which she took part—or at least gave a not unwilling ear—in which religion, and the topics of the day, were discussed without any reference to authority human or divine, and frequently in a spirit of direct opposition to both.

A passage from a journal which she kept in the year 1835 shows how deeply her faith was troubled by the infidel opinions held by those by whom she was surrounded.

"My thoughts seem like a troubled sea; they depress and weigh upon me. There is no stability in them, no repose; and yet I am conscious of an ardour which transcends the limits of the possible. Sometimes I find myself absorbed in questions which are above my comprehension and which I feel I should do better to ignore . . . I long to know everything, to analyse everything; and finding myself launched into terrifying regions, I boldly ask the meaning of all things, pursued by an unquiet spirit which asks to know the truth and which nothing seems able to satisfy. . . . These thoughts are succeeded by dreams which have their source in the heart; a craving for

affection which nothing seems to satisfy ; of impossible union of souls—as if such things were to be found here below ! Hence comes a disgust of life ; sadness in which one takes pleasure, and which I hide under an appearance of indifference because I am conscious that there is nobody who has a moment to throw away on the task of raising up my heart. Wearied of myself, I would fain annihilate this faculty—silence it, cut it short. But God only has, in His quality of Master, said to the waves and the sea : 'You shall go no further.'

" I am alone, alone in the world, in a bitter solitude of heart ; what matters it to me what passes around me ? the joyous laughter in which I join, the friends who know me not and who press my hand without concerning themselves whether I suffer or not ? In spite of this they are fond of me. I owe much to them and have nothing to reproach them with—and yet when I am with them I feel more than ever alone. If I died tomorrow, I should be forgotten the day after ; no one would come and pray beside my grave. And yet I pray for others, but they do not know of it, or if they did, what difference would it make to them ? Would that I could learn to detach myself from these worldly friends before my last hour comes, and that I could accomplish my duty of active work. To pray is not everything, prayer must be converted into action, and if I did any good God would stoop to me, for He is the God of all consolation, Who has promised to raise up and console the afflicted heart."

In these words which Eugénie confides to the pages of her journal, for want of a friendly ear, that of mother, sister, or intimate friend to whom she could unburden herself, we realise how helpless she was in her solitude of soul before the great problems of life. We shall see how three or four years later, describing her feelings at this period, she said that there were moments when she doubted of the immortality of the

soul. That her soul did not altogether suffer shipwreck was due to the love and faith which she preserved in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist: "The heart has its reasons which the mind knows not." Her heart had been touched by divine grace at the time she made her first Communion and the recollection of those sacred moments remained with her when the grounds on which her faith rested were shaken though not, happily, destroyed.

After a time M. Milleret withdrew his daughter from the care of Mme Doulcet and confided her to that of his cousin Mme Foulon. Nothing could have been more marked than the difference of atmosphere of these two families and their surroundings. In the one the world revealed itself in its most attractive colours; in the other, from which the gay world was carefully excluded, a strictly religious spirit prevailed, which, excellent as it no doubt was, failed in being attractive. Eugénie's biographer speaks of her residence with Mme Foulon as being a time of trial, and says: "She found the house dull, the piety of her cousins narrow and their faith uninspiring; in short, no link of sympathy united her with them."

Mme Foulon spent the summer (as is commonly done in well-to-do French families) in the country, and the winter in Paris. Thus Eugénie found herself in the Lent of 1836 in the Capital, with the opportunity of following a course of sermons in one or other of the leading churches. The public attention in the preceding year had been strongly drawn to the conferences given at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame by the Dominican Père Lacordaire; and as these were resumed in 1836 she elected to attend them. The popularity of that great pulpit orator, who was to the nineteenth century what Bossuet was to the seventeenth may be gauged by the fact that it was usual for those who wished to secure a seat for the sermon to assist at a High Mass at 10 A.M. and remain in the

church till it began at 1. Lacordaire was then at the commencement of his career. He had at that time made up his mind—and at the conclusion of the Lenten course of sermons he carried out his determination—to enter the Order of Friars Preachers. If the impression made by his preaching owed much to a great natural gift of eloquence, it owed even more to his fervent piety and to the austerity of his life, which were living proofs of the truths of the Gospel which he inculcated. Like a valiant soldier in Christ's army, he was not satisfied with fighting in His defence; he carried his warfare into the enemy's country, exposing the hollowness of its teaching, its inconsistencies and its errors. Many were the conversions he made; the sacristy, his confessional, were thronged by people who wished to set their doubts at rest, or who wished to start a new life under his direction.

Upon none of his hearers did his words make a greater impression than upon Eugénie. Her soul seemed to wake to a new life. His fiery eloquence found a response in her which forced her to believe that what he said came to her straight from God, so that in writing to him she could, as already mentioned, truthfully say she owed the foundation of her salvation to the grace of her first Communion and his words.

A religious of the Order of the Assumption, who was also her biographer, gives the following account of an interview which Eugénie sought with Lacordaire during the course of the Lent of 1836.

"Our Mother," she writes, "has often described to us her first visit to Père Lacordaire, and the emotion she felt at finding herself alone in the presence of the great orator. For a moment she could not utter a word, whilst the priest, with a grave, dignified, and eminently religious aspect, his eyes bent on the ground and his arms crossed waited for the young girl to explain the object of her visit. After a short pause, Lacordaire saw fit to break the silence, and in the

course of the conversation which followed he must have seen what manner of soul God had sent to him. To her questions on faith, on a Christian life, on a vocation to a religious life, he made but one answer: 'Are you acquainted' he asked, 'with the Order founded for the redemption of captives? It is that of men who, knowing that there were other men who were slaves, offered to sacrifice their liberty in order to rescue them. That is what the religious life consists in—it is the gift of oneself in order to save souls.'"

It was in this light that Mother Marie Eugénie saw henceforth the religious life, and she faced it at eighteen years of age.

Père Lacordaire, meanwhile, did not consider that the hour had come to decide anything. This young girl who passed so rapidly from a state of doubt to that of being ready to adopt a religious life, must be given time to mature her powers. "Pray and wait" were his last words; they were the words of one who treated souls with deep respect. He might have exercised a decisive influence over this soul who consulted him with such implicit confidence, and have made use of her later on in his undertakings, but it was in his nature to depend on no one. One of his characteristics was a great delicacy which made him respect the feelings of others, and caused him to forbear from imposing his views on them. One thing more Lacordaire did, at Eugénie's request, before they parted. It was to suggest a list of books to her. Amongst those he recommended were the *Mysteries of Faith*, by Bourdaloue, the miscellaneous writings of de Bonald, and the works of Joseph de Maistre.

Some jottings in Eugénie's diary, written in the course of 1836, help us to see the effect of her studies, and the reflections she made upon them.

"I am asked how I have passed from a state of doubt to one of faith. The more I believe, the more the chain of reasoning eludes me. If in spite of this,

I seek to sum up the causes, it appears to me that the following were the questions I should put to myself. One must *act* when one doubts, and one must begin by asking oneself what is good and what is evil—a question which appeared to me unanswerable without God, and a God who had manifested Himself. Accordingly, there is a God, and one who holds communication with us; for if not we should have to ask ourselves if there was such a thing as good or evil; and this I felt it was impossible for me to refuse to believe. But whence come good and evil? What is the foundation of these beliefs? Clearly they must be attributed to a God who had spoken to His creature and traced out his duties; to a law-giver having the power to impose laws, that is to say having all power over us. We must add to this idea of power that of justice as being the sole cause of the respect and honour we bear towards the law of good, which can only be that of obedience to the will of God, as evil is the rebellion against it. . . . What is the cause of God occupying Himself with us? What does He ask for? What end does He seek? What is the law which rules His intercourse with us? Ah! What a superb answer Christianity makes to these questions in the word *love*. . . .

"But if this First Cause, this Infinite Spirit, foresees all things, how can we be free who are under His power? And if He does not forsee and direct all things, He must be limited. What limits has He? Who is more powerful than He? Who is the Infinite above Him—as the finite presupposes the Infinite . . . ? I knew not what answer to make: but I felt that I was a free agent, and I understood that it was necessary that we should be free in order that He should impose duties on us. Good and evil cannot exist without liberty, and I cannot admit to myself that they do not exist. This is for me a first principle, an undeniable fact; an axiom on which my reason and life are founded.

"What is man's natural state? I am ignorant of this too. But is it to know nothing, to do evil, to be brutal, wicked; to be as far as possible removed from the ideal we put before ourselves of the perfection of a being? Or does a man approach nearer to his nature in proportion to his becoming more perfect and more enlightened? . . . I have sometimes tormented myself with the thought that I am not sufficiently moved by the love of God and that I am moved more by love and admiration for the perfection to which the Christian religion calls one. I love justice, probity, purity, humility, self-abnegation, ardent charity, and I desire to acquire those virtues for their own sake. But I have reassured myself by the reflection that in loving them I am loving God who is absolute perfection, the plentitude of all perfections. I feel I cannot form any idea of God apart from such things; I cannot think of Him except as the source and essence of all good, so that it would be impossible for man to be good, just virtuous, except by a kind of emanation from His nature—and this we must ask of Him persistently in prayer."

After developing this idea at some length, Eugénie continues: "God is love. If I love, God reigns in my heart. God is holy; He will abide in me if I am holy. God is truth; if I love truth and believe it, I shall possess Him; to sum up all: to aspire to perfect love, perfect sanctity and perfect truth is to aspire to God; for, if I may say so, He is all those things. But for what concerns Jesus Christ, God made man, I should wish for somthing yet more. My senses long to see, to touch His Sacred Humanity; my lips to kiss His Feet, my eyes to shed tears over His Wounds. In drawing near to us by an astounding act of abasement, He has sanctified our human flesh, so that it also becomes inflamed by heavenly desires which can only be satiated by a union as close as it is in the nature of the *heart* to desire, and spiritual as befits our spirit."

On another occasion she writes :

" I cling to my faith as one does to something one has discovered ; and it would be trying to me to renounce certain arguments and ideas which have led up to it. Many things I see scandalize and grieve me. It appears to me that Christians are not sufficiently Christian ; the least mixture of worldliness in pious practices distresses me. Am I then more ardent in my faith because it still bears marks upon it of the intoxication of the battlefield and the triumph of victory ? . . . Should it not be a source of consolation to me to think that Jesus loved little ones so much ? I am but a child in the faith ; I have only lately begun to wake to the life of grace. Thus I can have no other merit than that which comes from great humility. May God give it to me ! "

After a few more remarks upon the way by which she had received the gift of faith, she continues. " True, that when after faith I found love, all these things lost their attraction for me. I wished that all should be silent within me ; I only sought to plunge my soul in the stream of Blood which I beheld flowing on the altar. But as I still preserve the power of thought, why is it that the arguments which mastered me, the reflections I made appear to have forsaken me ? Ought I to complain of this now ? or rather should I not rejoice to find myself amongst the number of the poor in spirit—secure that should the day come when I might require such things for my brothers or myself, God would supply them : whether it was a question of a convincing thought, or of the daily bread which He bids us ask of Him ? . . . Oh no ! I have no wish to disturb the sacred slumber in which our Lord appears to let me rest on His heart ; and when the hour comes for my awakening, I shall be glad to find myself little and feeble as long as He does not wish me otherwise."

A little later, we read, " God sees that I am too

cowardly to make progress without sensible consolation. He appears to send me graces which are so sweet and evident that I have no more merit in believing than St Thomas had after the Resurrection. I, who was so cold, so dissipated and dry, I, whose soul seemed, as it were, cut off from divine sources to such an extent that I found a difficulty in representing to myself the presence of God, have of late been moved in an utterly opposite direction. Nature in its spring beauty speaks to me of God and gives me confidence in Him. A thousand heaven-sent thoughts touch my heart. There are indeed considerations which please some pious souls, but which leave me cold, but I do not think there is any harm in leaning towards those which suit my temperament, and amongst all those which have the power of moving me the thought that God condescends to lead me, to listen to me, to draw near and unite Himself to me in the closest manner is the most powerful."

Many years later, Eugénie was accustomed to tell her daughters in religion that she found all her happiness at this period of her life in her Communions. "The joy I experienced was perhaps too sensible," she used to add, "but our Lord was indulgent to me because I was weak and I had no support excepting His." She recalled in conversation on such occasions how the beauty of the country touched her heart when she used to rise in the early morning to go to the little parish church to assist at the Holy Sacrifice: "I used to pray on my way there, but much more on my return, for I then bore within me Him who had created nature in all its beauty, the woods, the rivers, the harvest-fields. The sight of a corn-field recalled the Holy Eucharist to my mind: the wheat of the elect, the bread of angels; and frequently I was touched even to tears in thinking of God's love for us."

Like the spouse of the Canticles she had found Him whom her soul loved, and could hear Him say "the

winter has passed and gone, the flowers have appeared in the lands—*surge, amica mea, speciosa mea, et veni.*" "Formerly," she continues, "I used to find solitude oppressive, and longed to unburden myself to someone, to find sympathy and affection, and after this I fretted uselessly. When I see how contrary the spirit of the world is to the law of Christ I think God has been very merciful in providing us with a means of escape. It is so difficult to be poor in spirit in the midst of riches, ready to sacrifice the affection which surrounds one, to be in the world and not to love it, to keep pure in spite of corruption, to live in the midst of temptation and not to give way, to be thrown off one's guard neither by praise nor blame. It needs great strength of character to lead a life of humility, poverty and detachment in the world, and great holiness never to give scandal, and all the same our Lord said, 'Woe to the world because of scandals.' 'Woe to him by whom scandal cometh.'

"I know not whether it is permissible for me to think, as I do sometimes, that God shows a special solicitude for me. Possibly this comes from pride, and yet it is a thought which touches me deeply. It is impossible for me not to believe it when I think of the number of unforeseen circumstances which nothing I have done could account for—chances people would call them—which have brought me good advice, encouragement, or lessons on my cowardice, my presumption or my vanity.

"How often without my looking for them, books which have done me good are put into my hands. The other day, Madame Levaillant, who never gives me books, lent me the *Annals of the Faith*, which sufficed to move me to tears. I marvelled as I read that I dared be satisfied with my idle life, when even this age of scepticism has its heroic martyrs and confessors, and there is so much good to be done close at hand.

"When I look back on my life I am struck with admiration at the miracles by which I have been saved from incredulity; and I am tempted sometimes to think that God has got designs upon me, and if I cannot reconcile this with the knowledge I have of my unworthiness, I tell myself that He loves to make use of the vilest, the poorest, the most insignificant of 'earthen vessels', so that His greatness should shine the more. All is possible to Him, and it would be a false humility to refuse to lean upon His strength."

Abbé Combalot.

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CHAPTER III

" In la sua voluntade è nostra pace."
DANTE.

In the winter and spring of 1837 Eugénie found herself once more in Paris in company with Mme Foulon and her daughters. Lent arrived, and with it the services customary at that season. Whilst debating what course of sermons she would attend, she had a singular dream, in which she saw herself listening to a sermon preached by a priest of striking appearance to a large congregation—the preacher and church being equally unknown to her. At the same time an interior voice spoke to her, saying, " This is the guide you are in search of; he will lead you in the way you are to follow."

The next day some relations of hers came and pressed her to go with them to the church of St Eustache, where a celebrated preacher, the Abbé Combalot, was giving a course of Lenten sermons. She accompanied them; and directly she entered the building she recognized the church, the pulpit, and soon after, the preacher whom she had seen in her dream.

Eugénie was not superstitious; and although she was struck by the coincidence she did not attach much importance to it. The sermon, too, we are told, did not impress her very favourably. Perhaps she compared him with Lacordaire and he suffered by comparison; for, M. Combalot, though an eloquent preacher, was no genius. In spite of her first impression of M. Combalot being unfavourable, Eugénie returned several times to hear him, and finally made up her mind to go and consult him on the subject of the great wish which she had to work for God.

After exchanging a few words with her, he asked, somewhat abruptly, "Have you a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin?" Eugénie, taken by surprise, answered hesitatingly "Not so much as I should like to have."

"Ah! Then I have no use for you."

There was a reason for this very disconcerting answer of which Eugénie was ignorant. M. Combalot's mind was much occupied at that time with a project of founding a teaching congregation in honour of the mystery of the Assumption, and whilst she was talking the thought had flashed upon him that this young girl might be a heaven-sent instrument in the undertaking. Accordingly, in spite of the rebuff he had administered he continued: "Come and see me to-morrow at 6.30 in my confessional before I say Mass."

Thus, without Eugénie having taken any initiative in the matter, she found herself enrolled amongst the number of his penitents. M. Combalot was an excellent confessor: zealous, pious, and above all an enthusiast in God's service. But his direction did not suit Eugénie; she would have preferred less impetuosity and more discretion and—perhaps—common-sense. Accordingly after a short time she took the opportunity when asking him to return some medals and other things which she had given him to bless, to say that she had made up her mind to take another confessor. The letter conveying these tidings was given by Eugénie to the sacristan; meanwhile she awaited his answer in the church. It was not long in coming; M. Combalot came out of the sacristy and made signs to his penitent to follow him to his confessional.

"You must not leave me," were his first words. "It is God's will that you should be under my direction. There was something in your letter!" A pause. "Have you studied much?"—"As regards

education, Father, I have only had the usual one of young girls." "All the same, there was something in that letter"—he repeated, as if he could not get over the impression it had made upon him. "God sent you to me. He wishes you to remain under my direction."

When a priest addressed her in the name of God, Eugénie felt there was no course open to her except to obey. She continued therefore under M. Combalot's direction, and he was not long in convincing himself that he had found in the person of this girl of twenty what he had long been in search of: the foundation-stone of the future Congregation of our Lady of the Assumption. By degrees he acquainted her with his hopes and intentions. Once more she was both repelled and attracted by the prospect held out to her, and by him who unveiled it to her. On the one hand she saw the opportunity of carrying out the earnest desire which she had nursed in her heart ever since her interview with Lacordaire, and which circumstances had helped to strengthen, of working for the salvation of souls. On the other, she felt herself utterly incompetent for the task which her director wished to assign to her. May it not also be surmised that, even at this early date of her connection with him, Eugénie had not that full and entire confidence in M. Combalot which, in embarking on an enterprise of this sort, was so essential to its success and to her peace of mind?

When, therefore, M. Combalot enlarged on the greatness and beauty of the work which he wished to set on foot: namely that of establishing a teaching Order which would put religion, and devotion to the interests of the Church, foremost amongst its aims and objects, Eugénie heartily agreed with him. But when he told her he looked on her as the person chosen to carry out this work her answer was, "I know nothing of the religious life. I have everything to learn, and am incapable of founding anything in the Church of God." "It is Jesus Christ," he answered, "who

will be the Founder of our Assumption. We are but His instruments and in His hand the weakest are the most powerful."

Eugénie hesitated, and refused for some time to give a positive answer. Her biographer says of her: "The name of Foundress terrified her. But whilst the priest spoke to her in God's name, telling her that the work was dependent on her consent, that she was not at liberty to refuse it, our Lord was also speaking to her heart moving her to obedience." Eugénie, during the Lent of 1837, was deeply conscious of the workings of divine grace. Our Saviour instilled in her such a lively sense of His presence in the Blessed Sacrament that she felt herself annihilated at the foot of the Tabernacle. "It sufficed me," she told us, "to see the door of St Sulpice for me to be touched even to tears at the thought of the boundless love of Jesus Christ for me, and of His presence on our altars. I wept also in thinking of the task God had imposed on me. I felt the weight of this undertaking most terribly, and it needed a special grace and sense of God's protection to force my consent. I should have much preferred entering the company of Sisters of Charity, as nursing the sick had been my attraction since I was a child."

Eugénie had never been confirmed, and she felt deeply the need of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to bring peace, and what she required perhaps even more, a supernatural strength to face the task before her. "I have not had the sacrament of Confirmation," she told her director. "Let me receive the Holy Ghost, I shall then be a new creature, and perhaps I shall be able to respond to your views and be capable of accepting the burden you would lay upon me."

Accordingly, Eugénie was confirmed by Mgr. de Quélen in the oratory of the Archiepiscopal palace on Low Sunday, 1837. The day, or rather the graces she received on that day, made it an eventful one in

her life. She said later on, "On that day my vocation was fixed. Confirmation was a door for me, through which I passed into a new life."

M. Combalot was engaged by the Dominicans to preach a retreat in their church in Paris directly after Lent. Eugénie assisted at it; and as she made notes of her thoughts and resolutions during its progress, we can judge of the effect it had on her. "God calls me into solitude with an irresistible attraction. If I hesitate in following it, I am torn in two; all the faculties of my soul seem troubled and annihilated, and I feel I could not exist in that state. But the moment I put myself entirely in God's hands, a profound peace comes over me which consoles me for everything. I can then stiel fell sad, but I no longer suffer." Eugénie did not forget in these outpourings of her soul, her father and brother, who in spite of the deep division between them were intensely dear to her. Thus in a previous entry in her diary, we come on the following. "How I wish I could give my brothers some of the feelings I experience; I feel so calm and confident in the blessings which come to me, and it appears to me that they are so clearly the work of God that I have no fear of claiming them, so that from that point of view my unworthiness encourages me instead of casting me down." Again she refers to them a little later, and appeals to them to bear with her even though they do not share her aspirations: "Life is short, we shall soon meet in another world. Do you know that if, whilst I was resisting grace, some misfortune befell those dear to me, I should never be able to console myself—feeling that I was the cause of it? What deceives you is that you think I am led by self-will—by a spell: that is not at all the case. My will is shattered—*mastered*. Were I even sure of only meeting with trials, I should not falter for a moment. And then could not God take me in a few hours? If I died, I should be lost to you and to myself. I

should have done no good, I should stand before the judgment-seat my hands empty of good works which would have served to plead for others and for myself."

In spite of the courage with which Eugénie, fortified by grace, faced the future, there were times in which nature asserted her right to be heard. "At this moment" she writes, "I am troubled and afraid. I rebel beforehand against many things, and have fallen into a terrible state of uneasiness and a refusal of my will to act: an anxiety and dreadful reaction. Still the Holy Ghost presses me to will as God wills! How clearly He points out my vocation to me in the counsels of a director whom God has sent me, in the graces God has given me, and in the lights I have received. . . . Finally in the duty I have of working for my mother's soul and for the souls of those I love. I try to resist the Holy Ghost, and—wretched creature that I am—I wish to escape from Him. However, thanks be to God, so far I have been worsted on the fight. Then in the depths of my anguish I end by being forced to place myself in God's hands, and to tell Him that His will *must* be done, whatever it costs me; that my life is His to dispose of according to His good pleasure. Directly I have said this from the bottom of my heart, an ineffable peace spreads through my being; all the waters of bitterness in my thoughts, all my uneasiness subsides; everything appears easy to me and I rest in the assurance that God is with me, that He is pleased with me and accepts me, and that I am united to Him."

On another occasion she writes, "I require the severities of a cloistered life to become truly Christian. Free from that restraint, if anyone speaks to me of works which please my imagination, I find myself led on to talk of the books I love, and of my taste for poetry, and of my ideas. And what are all these things but desires for earthly happiness? Such is not the Christian's life; with its calm, its love of God, its per-

fect detachment, its mortification with regard to the joys and gratification of the senses, its humility, its obedience and its 'walk before God.' What I require is that I should be constantly reminded of all this. As a religious all my actions would be controlled down to the smallest detail, and under the discipline of a Rule I should be forced to submit and become what I ought to be. This could never happen in the world; *there* everything carries me away, and already I am a cause of temptation to myself—one against which I have to arm myself with all the strictness of the precepts of the cloister. Nothing in the shape of mortifications, fasting, poverty, obedience, continuous and enforced labour, long prayer, unbroken silence, absence of the pleasures and comforts of life would be superfluous in my case; I require all to conquer nature and to make a Christian of me. The revolt at the very thought of these things raises in me the sufficient proof that it is so. If I was truly detached, should I feel thus? These anticipations seem hard to me now; and yet such is the path to salvation. Only in a convent should I be able to do what I must do in order to follow the teaching of the Gospel and imitate Jesus Christ. I must therefore decide on entering one.

"When we give ourselves altogether to God, as the saints, as religious, as martyrs have done, in reality we only give Him what belongs to Him. When we embrace sufferings out of love for God, we are only making them easy for us to bear; and it is astounding that He should deign to reward us for doing so, for He might have made us suffer those same things, and we should have no right to complain or to ask for anything in return.

"It is singular to realise how we treat with God as one power would with another power; refusing to give ourselves up to Him; claiming this thing; flinching from another; making a merit out of what

we give Him—miserable atoms that we are who before Him are as if we were not. And what immense incomprehensible goodness on God's side that He should take account of a tear shed, of a sigh, a thought, and forgive the insults of a weak and rebellious creature."

Later on in her journal, Eugénie, after remarking that if her beloved brother, the companion of her childhood, had lived in the days of the Crusaders and had "taken the Cross", though she might have tried to keep him back, she would not have upbraided him for leaving her: "Well," she continues, "in our days there is also a Catholic crusade, our Saviour's crusade, the crusade of faith. I also would wish to bring my stone to help in the glorious edifice which humble architects are raising; and if necessary I am ready to mingle my drop of blood with theirs. Self-sacrifice is the condition of all fruitful work—of all virtue. To leave you whom I love is a sacrifice like that of death,—and could I, who believe that I should be capable of dying for God, hesitate if He asked me to make it? And as to death, is it not a fate which awaits us to-morrow? Think this of me, that I die, and that I die joyfully in order to begin to live a great, a divine life. God has done so much for me! I wish to do something for Him: not that He has any need of me, but because one must not oppose God's designs. It pleases Him to show forth His power in what is the smallest and most insignificant; but the worm must not refuse to do His will; the clay must not revolt in the hands of the potter. God has left us free, free even to put obstacles to His designs: a terrifying power, when we reflect that the smallest act of revolt on our part may be productive of so much evil, or prevent so much good. . . . Thus when last year my heart jumped for joy at the names of those illustrious defenders of the faith—Lamennais before his fall, Lacordaire, Montalembert and the others, and that I

longed to be a man in order to be splendidly useful; and that I said to myself that they were saving our country by bringing her back and steeping her in the source of truth, I little thought that it might be given to me, who am full of weakness and miseries, to associate myself in their great enterprises. And it is so; for if my humble sacrifice is fulfilled, God will bless it as He has their great undertakings. Perhaps I also may do great things; perhaps I may have saints for daughters, and perhaps they in their turn may contribute to the salvation of souls. . . . All this is possible if only I learn how to die to myself with sufficient thoroughness in order that Jesus Christ may live in me. Then He will put into me that which He will deign to think worthy of recompense. What a marvel of love! Before it, what can one do but annihilate oneself and adore."

Eugénie at the conclusion of her retreat made a vow of chastity and obedience, coupled with a promise to consecrate her life to the work of the Assumption.

A beginning was accordingly made; but when further steps had to be taken, a marked divergence arose between Eugénie and M. Combalot. The former was not blind to the many obstacles which still lay before them: the greatest and most formidable being her youth and complete ignorance of religious life and all that it implied, and the opposition she was certain to meet with from her family. Such things were to her impetuous director mere cobwebs, to be brushed away by the exercise of a determined will. As Eugénie however, meanwhile, had suffered in health from stress of mind consequent on a decision which (as we read between the lines in her journal) cost her very deeply, a compromise was arrived at; and she accepted an invitation to spend the summer with friends of her childhood in Lorraine. Her letters to M. Combalot show us what was passing in her mind whilst revisiting these scenes in which her early life had been spent.

" The time I am spending in Lorraine I look upon as a truce, and it is one which my health required, and which God has given me, as He never gives trials greater than we have strength to bear. I trust in His goodness, and on my return to Paris I shall recommence with fresh courage to do all that is necessary to belong to Him wholly. Our Lord has given me a great attraction for your work, and I would willingly go through much in order to be able to devote myself utterly to it."

In this visit to Metz and its neighbourhood Eugénie renewed acquaintance with many old friends, of whom she writes as follows: " I am being petted and made much of here. Everyone wishes to see the little girl now that she is grown up. They find me greatly changed, all the more so because of the shade of sadness which I assume, which is accounted for by past memories in revisiting this place. People wished to arrange parties of pleasure for me, but my father allows me to refuse them. However, my unsociable ways have been forgiven me, and everything is done to gratify my newly-acquired tastes. My room is full of books. I have even two Bibles. I have no great taste for ascetical writings, but I have asked for the *Spirit of St Teresa;* her works always inspire me with the spirit of prayer, of compunction, of humility and love. I have a great admiration also for St Paul, and —see if I have not anticipated your intentions—I have several times invoked him lately, and I should like to make him one of the special patrons of the work of the Assumption, whose object will be also to spread amongst women the treasures of the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

As we shall see later on, this admiration for the writings of St Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, and for those of St Teresa, became more and more marked in Eugénie as the life of grace developed in her soul. " The comfort of the scriptures," of which the great

Apostle speaks, was a fountain from which she was ever to draw fresh strength and grace in the trials of life.

The family with whom Eugénie spent the summer consisted of a widowed mother, Mme Néron, and her three daughters. Nothing could have been pleasanter than her surroundings at Beauregard, which was the name of their country place. The daughters were her contemporaries and the companions of her youth, and what was even more important, were in perfect sympathy with her on the question of religion. A letter to her director describes the life she led there as follows: "I am staying in a delightful house, with people who are perhaps only too fond of me, and where I have found once more three friends of my childhood and their mother, who showed me special kindness in times of sadness during my past life. They are all women of strong affection; one of them would gladly follow me into the religious life, but I doubt if she is called to it. Like me, they have been saddened by being surrounded by men who were unbelievers, and by the influence of boarding-schools in Paris where religion hardly made itself felt. They breathe freely in company with one from whom they have nothing they need conceal. My faith strengthens theirs, and we are in perfect sympathy. Only they have a higher opinion of me than I deserve, because I speak better than I act. They consult me in their difficulties; I might almost say I am a kind of supplementary confessor to them, which is a dignity of which I feel the weight considerably! I am inclined to laugh at the way we pass from conversations on the most serious subjects to schoolgirl jokes and games; to the recollection of our early childhood; to our quarrels and pleasures. . . . To-morrow is my birthday" (she finishes by saying) "I shall be twenty. In a year, therefore, whatever happens, I shall be at liberty to give myself up to your work. If it is of use, as I believe it will be, I do not think that God could confer a greater

benefit upon us than to make use of us, and in a manner to associate us with His merciful Providence—accounting as a merit a co-operation which He could do without."

This letter, dated 24th August, was succeeded by another in which she begs M. Combalot to take care of his health (rumours having reached her of his being laid upon a sick-bed) and which she ends with these words : " I shall pray in a very special manner for you to the Blessed Virgin our Protectress."

M. Combalot's answers to Eugénie show the light in which he views his penitent who was soon to be his coadjutor.

" You need not recommend yourself to my prayers, my dear child ; they belong to you by right. I found the hopes which are dearest to my heart upon you. I am convinced that you are destined to realise the dream of my life."

On another occasion he wrote : " I have believed and still think that you are called to the religious life, and my great wish is that it should be fully developed in you. God brought us together and He has permitted that you should appreciate my advice. After having studied you carefully, it appeared to me that you were endowed with an intelligence, prudence and knowledge of human nature which were much in advance of your years. I then acquainted you with my projects. Was I mistaken ? I think not. But you must prepare yourself for a fight. You must make generous efforts to carry off the victory—one worthy of the eldest daughter of my hopes, and you must be prepared to walk courageously in the path of sanctity. Our Lady of the Assumption asks this insistently of her who is called to take the foremost part in a work which is so urgently required. Be not astonished, my dear child, if the world, which is the enemy of Jesus Christ, treats your plans with derision ; and if it tries to impede your progress to the holy Mount by scoffing at the pious aspirations you have to die to this world of dust and

gold so as to live the life to which the poverty of Jesus Christ gives rise. You have put your hand to the plough, do not look back; my faith and my heart tell me that you will help me powerfully to realise this work to the glory of the Mother of God. To attain this end, you will have to suffer; your sensitiveness will have to endure many a shock. Enemies from without and within will set upon you with desperate fury. I can promise you in the name of Jesus Christ many combats, many privations, perhaps even many tears. But the more conformed we are to Christ our Friend, our Saviour, our Brother, the more sure we shall be of His unswerving support.

"Believe me, dear child, the day which we call life passes with the rapidity of a dream. Yet to a soul armed with noble and Christian aspirations it suffices to gain a glory of which God alone knows the value and the worth. Do not look back. Trim your lamp; adorn your soul with the virtues of modesty, innocence, humility, self-abnegation, simplicity and love. God calls you to be the bride of Christ—begin to habituate yourself to despise false friendships, false goods, false virtues and false wisdom."

Eugénie had done her utmost to prepare her family and friends for the shock which awaited them by a gradual change of her habits and way of life. She avoided society as much as possible by showing her preference for a life of solitude and prayer. But her director was ever urging upon her the necessity of declaring openly her intentions to her father. This she did, accordingly, at the end of September of the same year. The letter in which she asked his permission to embrace the religious life is not forthcoming but M. Milleret's answer to it runs as follows:—

"Your letter, my dear Eugénie, caused me much pain, and made me reflect seriously on the determination you have taken. I do not presume to interfere with my children's vocations, nor their establishment

in life, but I should like to disabuse them of false ideas. If you only think of going to a convent because you do not wish to remain any longer with Mme Foulon, come and make your home with me; I will take another apartment, and you shall keep house for me. If, on the contrary, you wish to give up the world and an establishment of your own, then let me tell you that you are very young to bind yourself irrevocably, and that you will give yourself hereafter cause for bitter regrets. Look around, reflect, wait for a while—at least till you have attained your majority, and then I shall no longer oppose your wishes."

This letter, which was so moderate in its tone that it could not fail to effect its purpose, made a great impression on Eugénie. She asked herself if God could require of her to sacrifice her dearest affections, her duty to her father, when by his offer of sharing his home with her she could have an opportunity given her of recalling his soul to God and the truths of religion. Her affection for her brother Louis also held her back. He was tenderly attached to his sister, and did nothing without consulting her; could she abandon him at that impressionable age when so much turns on home influence?

We see the outcome of these agitating reflections in a letter to M. Combalot.

"Should I not sacrifice my desires, my hopes, my vocation even, in order to look after my father, who invites me to go to him, and with the additional object of making home life more attractive to my brother, who is so young and still receptive of all good impressions? Should I not sacrifice even the happiness of devoting myself to a useful work and the hope of embracing a life more in conformity with my tastes and aspirations, with this object? If, when his last hour comes, my father has no one with him except people who would never think of getting him the helps afforded by the Church, and that he died without the Sacraments,

should I not have a lasting remorse ? There is nothing to prevent me from living entirely for God in the world. My father sees very few people ; as since his misfortunes he has lived a very solitary life. If, then, after looking after him and nursing him, I should survive him (he is nearly sixty years of age), I could perhaps then consecrate my life to God, though I should have in this case to renounce your work, and that would be a great sacrifice on my part. After all, do I not wish to do God's will ? Is not His greater glory what I seek ? Filial piety, love of God, even the spirit of penance (for it would give me much to suffer), do not all these things invite me, press me to accept the proposal ? I leave it to you to decide, my dear Father ; think it well over ; and I beg of you not to allow yourself to be influenced by the desire you might have to see me enter your Congregation, nor by the kind and holy affection which you have been kind enough to bestow on me. I communicated this morning with the intention of asking of God the strength of mind, the light and the assistance which I require. Do you think our Lord would not give them to me in order to live in the world if I decided on doing so for His honour and glory and in order to serve Him ? "

This letter reached M. Combalot at Turin where he was preaching a retreat. His answer is dated 18th October :

" I have received, my very dear daughter, your letter from Thionville, in which you acquaint me with your father's proposal. I fully understand how a heart like yours must have been touched and moved by it. But such is not your mission, my dear child ; God has another in preparation for you. It lies with you to make yourself worthy of it. What you had best do now is to take up your abode for a year in a religious house as boarder with the single object of studying the way of perfection, and of acquiring the knowledge which is allied to, and necessary for our great designs."

He goes on to say that he will be detained at Turin till Christmas, and concludes with the following appeal: "I find in you all that I had so long sought for, I say *all*, because the virtues in which you are deficient will be given you. Courage then, my dear daughter; you will do more, a thousand times more, for the salvation of your relations by consecrating yourself to God than by remaining in the world.[1] I would say to you in the words of the Prophet, 'Hearken, my daughter, and see, and incline thy ear; forget thy people and thy father's house.' Make a generous sacrifice — betake yourself to solitude, and there God, who calls you, will shower down His gifts on you."

Eugénie received this order, for it was no less, as coming to her from God, and obeyed it to the letter, much as it cost her to do so. Her father, though not without bitter reproaches, we are told, agreed to her wishes and went with her on her return to Paris, to inspect the convent which M. Combalot had recommended to her as being suitable for the end he had in view. The community belonged to the Order of Benedictines of the Blessed Sacrament, and the convent was situated in one of the most deserted quarters of Paris and was the reverse of attractive in its outward appearance. Eugénie's heart sank when she passed inside its doors. This unfavourable impression was not lost on M. Milleret, who rejoiced in the thought that nothing could be more adapted to bring his daughter round to his views, and to disgust her with what he no doubt looked upon as a foolish and unnatural delusion. Eugénie's feelings about her new abode are reflected in a letter to her director, dated 3rd November.

"Nothing could be more dreary than this convent of the nuns of the Blessed Sacrament. It cost me much to come to it. It means the separation from all

[1] M. Combalot proved a true prophet, for Eugénie's father, her brother Louis, and her uncle made good ends.

whom I love. I feel the step I am taking is a decisive one. My soul has been in a state of great agitation during the last few days: regrets, grief, disquietude, take possession of it in turn. What alarms me most is the fear that nothing should come of your enterprise; but I will try to shut my eyes to my misgivings, silence my reasonings, and submit. To-morrow morning I am going with my father to make definite arrangements at the convent of the Blessed Sacrament, and I shall be settled there by the time I get your first letter."

The relief of putting the pent-up feelings of the heart into words is one that few can dispense with. Eugénie found this relief (a poor one at best) in her journal.

"I suffer all the agony of death, and yet I am very young to die, and to die for so long. Dreams of my childhood, where are you now? why should I have to put you away from me? . . . Parents, friends, companions of my childhood, I can only think of you with tears! I would rather weep with you than enjoy all the pleasures of life without you . . . but life is not intended for pleasure, and I must fulfill its duties. Do not all things suffer here below? Why should I wish to evade the universal law? It is the condition of all usefulness, of all virtue. My dreams of happiness may become a blessed reality. One must take courage and learn how to die—in that lies all. Many great things are achieved at the price of sacrifice."

In another page of her diary, she defends herself against the charge of heartlessness of which it would seem her family had accused her. "My heart, far from having become hardened, is enlarged; I love you as much, perhaps more, certainly better, because I do so in Jesus Christ; I love all my unknown brethren with a love which I pray God may increase daily in my heart. Shut up in myself, my egotism would be concentrated on three or four persons; now the world is

not large enough to contain my love. I should wish to spread it in floods upon all weary hearts, and above all to be able to give the light and love which I enjoy to all who have it not. In leaving you, I am sacrificing not you, but myself, and the pleasure I take in your society. All that I could do for you God can do, and a thousand times better. My prayers raised to heaven at the foot of the altar will draw down blessings on you so that the more I love you the more I should desire to leave you. Truth, peace, love, will descend into your hearts—can you therefore blame me because whilst I am obtaining these graces for you, I wish to do something for Him ? Is this then egotism ? Is it cold-heartedness to give up a pleasant independent life ; the sympathy and affection of friends ; the praise and vanities of the world ; in order to embrace the strict obligations, the hard life of obedience and poverty and continual death to self which go to make up the religious life ? No, that is not egotism ! The very thought of it purifies my heart and my affections. Then shall I truly love those I love—when neither receiving nor expecting to receive a glance of affection from them, I offer up day and night my fervent prayers for their happiness. And God will hear me, I feel convinced, for He rewards a hundredfold what we do for Him."

It was in the early days of November that Eugénie settled into her new quarters, and there she remained till the following July. First impressions are not always correct, and though the eight months she spent in the Benedictine monastery were unquestionably a time of trial, God came to her assistance and she enjoyed a peace of mind and spiritual consolation to which her soul had long been a stranger. A letter written to her director on 14th November reflects this happy change :

" Since the compensation you are kind enough to give me for keeping me under lock and key is the permission to write to you as often as I like, I am going to

avail myself of it. You may make your mind easy about me, I am quite comfortable here. My solitude pleases me, and the liberty which I have enjoyed since I came here would please me too if M. Gaume had not disposed of it by putting me under a rule of life. Accordingly to-morrow I shall no longer be my own mistress, as I consider I am entirely bereft of my self-will when all my actions are mapped out beforehand. It is only then that I shall begin to have some merit, as walls and grilles do not affect me much. . . . My room is fairly cheerful. Being on the third floor, I can see the games of Prisoner's base, and other games played in a school for little boys which is just opposite, and at the risk of shocking the prioress, I must own that I delight in their shouts of joy, which end by cheering me up. You see for the present I am satisfied with everything, which is what I had quite made up my mind to be. Of course from time to time a feeling of solitude comes over me—some remains of my former sadness—but I will have none of it, and after a time these thoughts will leave me at peace. Self-abandonment is, however, a difficult virtue. When I wrote you word that I was indifferent what your decision would be, that I was ready to abide by your judgment as to whether I should or should not enter here, I spoke in perfect good faith, and I was ready to congratulate myself if God made it possible for me to obey. But when the moment for action came it was no longer the same. My heart was very sore, and I felt it deeply. I regretted much your absence at a time when your words were so necessary to me in order to maintain my courage. And yet who knows whether (since God directs all things) your absence at this time may not have been in the designs of His Providence." Eugénie finishes this letter in a lighter vein, in which she makes quiet fun of her director's love for being always on the move : "*par voies et par chemins*" as her French biographer calls it.

" I must resign myself to knowing you are at such a distance. Besides you would really, my dear Father, be too unhappy if you had always to remain in the same spot. You may say what you like: unless you were paralysed you are not of a nature to remain shut up, even among the daughters of the Assumption should they exist some day! One consequence of my semi-pagan education—for such you say all education is in these times—is a habit of submission to the inevitable, from whence I trust will come in time a perfect conformity to God's will."

In his answer to this letter M. Combalot sympathises with the trials his penitent has gone through, and relates how he had suffered from similar ones. He ends by saying:

" My last letter will have told you how much I suffered from being separated from you at a time when it appears my presence might have been of some use to you. But God does all things well and I recognise with gratitude how He has Himself conducted this great enterprise which, I firmly believe, will redound to His glory and that of His Mother. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that Providence has predestined you to be the corner-stone of a truly divine work. You are not perfect. I share your opinion in this respect; but God has given you gifts such as I have never seen in anyone else. He has given you the strength to respond to my appeal, and to break with determination and wisdom the ties which retained you in the world. A distinguished ecclesiastic here to whom I showed your little work on education was exceedingly struck by it, and exclaimed after reading it: 'Here indeed is the woman whom God has chosen for the important work you are intent upon! you must not think of looking for anyone elsewhere'. . . . Courage then, my daughter, it depends on you to make me taste the only consolations which I look for on earth—those of leaving here below a little

memorial of my boundless devotion to the Queen of Heaven."

In a letter written by Eugénie on the 21st of November, which must have crossed the above from M. Combalot, she says :

" I spend an hour every evening before the Blessed Sacrament and the consolations I then enjoy increase daily. I go to the choir in the morning from 7 to 8 to make my meditation. I make it on the Gospels, a subject which always suits me. My aridity little by little has left me, and I shed tears sometimes, full of sweetness—of so much sweetness and even joy that I fear they may not be tears such as those to which our Lord has promised the remission of sins. To-day, the day of the Presentation, my Communion was full of consolation ; and I implored that blessed and merciful Mother that she would present me to God as she presented herself to Him, so that I may belong to Him alone."

The only complaint she has to make is that she has no outlet for " fraternal charity " ; and she goes on to say :

" It is very sweet for me to think that I shall, some day, be able to relieve myself by talking to you, and the Sisters you will give me, about the mercies of God, the glories of faith, of marvels which entrance the mind and touch the heart. When I am sad and downhearted I shall find a refuge in their supernatural affection, and when I in my turn abound in spiritual joy my treasures will not be for myself alone but my Sisters in Christ will rejoice with me. If God gives me this touching union and conformity of souls, what could I desire more ? "

A little later (December 6th) we find Eugénie protesting against what she considered was a too favourable opinion which her director had formed of her.

" You laughed this summer when I made out that your imagination was always running ahead of the

facts," she writes, "I then thought you judged me too severely. You must allow me *now* to expostulate with you for canonising me too quickly, for fear that in seeing me again you will have to fall from the clouds! Seriously, for I have no business to laugh over it, I am in want of your spiritual guidance. In spite of all the graces God has given me, I do not find a solid determination in myself to renounce everything; after having given up exterior things I do not give up the interior. I must also add that I fear to deceive myself upon what God asks of me. For all these reasons, I wish much to see you. I have no one to whom I can so easily explain myself, especially as you do not wish me to speak openly to M. Gaume. Our hopes, necessarily, take a large place in my thoughts and conduct, and give rise to new duties which I can only talk over with you. Thus I desire the help of your lights and perhaps even more of your authority, as I know that I obey you always much better than I do my good resolutions. Still you must not make a fresh trouble of this wish. One must learn how to wait; also if you were in Paris you would lose patience with my goings in and out. You would be astonished to find that my family ties were not entirely broken. I have to go gently, but I hope in the next month to have put things on a better footing. . . . You speak of not being ungrateful, but, Father, it is I who owe you everything. You do not realise what attractions life —happiness, have still for me; I have much need of your help not to succumb to them, or rather you put before me a sweeter and purer happiness. I terrify myself sometimes at the thought that our Lord desires that His disciples should renounce themselves. One must hate oneself, and, alas, I am so tender of myself!"

M. Combalot in his next letter tells Eugénie that he has come across a young Viennese lady of good family who had confided to him her desire to become

a nun, and who he thought might be induced to join them in their common enterprise. Eugénie welcomes the idea warmly, only she warns him against being too sanguine and too precipitate. The letter concludes with an allusion to some difficulties into which her director had got involved with the authorities of the dioceses in which he had been preaching :

" You see, my dear Father, that your manner of making up to Archbishops does not cause them to be very keen to have you as guest. Nevertheless they must end by loving you ! " The too zealous missionary, apparently, taught by his experience, had made resolutions to be more prudent in the future, and his penitent encourages him to persevere in this new departure : " I am very much pleased, my very dear Father, at the resolve you have made to cultivate the virtue of prudence. Believe me, you should carry it into your private affairs as well, and you would find out that simple and Christian prudence is the mother of charity as well as of success. Nature is at the root of that instinct to come out with all our thoughts ; the spiritual man examines into things, and only fastens on to what is good—your St Paul has said it. To sum up : let us pray to our Lord to lead us and carry us. Life is sad, but it does not last long. Happy is he who allows himself to be guided by grace, and supported by a vivid faith, such as our Lord has given you. All such things are insignificant when they are passed, and even at the very moment when they are crushing us, already they are taking flight far from us. God alone, and all for Him : that is the better part, the sole repose of the soul here below." In a subsequent letter, Eugénie returns to the question of subjects for the future Congregation :

" You are quite right, my dear Father, in thinking that I wish to see you using as much deliberation as possible in your choice of your daughters ; all my fear is that you should go too fast in anything. I no longer

feel the want of companions in my solitude; I am quite accustomed to it and am enjoying profound peace. The only possible regret I could have here is that of not profiting sufficiently by my liberty and solitude to fortify the spirit of Jesus Christ in my soul, and in acquiring the virtues which are wanting in me. The thought came to me to-day, whilst meditating on the mystery of the Assumption when saying my rosary, that it would never do for us to take as motto:[1] 'Woman has been raised up' (*la femme a été élevée*), nor to believe that we are called to make a revolution in education and religious Orders. It would befit us better, in order to act in the spirit of St Francis de Sales and of St Francis Paula, to say and think that, though wanting in the courage required to embrace the austerities, the cloistered life and strictness of established Orders, it has appeared to us that we might still glean a few ears of corn after them in the field of the Church; that a tenderly-united family leading a fervent and strictly religious life might be of use to souls of the same stamp, who would be enabled to serve God in a manner conformable to their weakness; that a religious education being the pressing want of the age it has struck us that this new religious family should consecrate itself to it, and try to introduce into it intelligent new methods, and Catholic ideas, and share in the movements which have these ends in view. And in putting ourselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin and honouring her in the mystery of her glorious Assumption into Heaven we trust she will sustain our weakness and will graciously accept our intention of honouring the day of her feast which Angels and saints celebrate in heaven. I should be afraid that in alleging other reasons there would not be enough charity, respect for the established Orders, nor sense of our own unworthiness and in-

[1] This letter apparently was in answer to one of Combalot's in which he had made the above suggestion.

capacity. . . . Jesus Christ, Mary, the Church, should be our motto. Why seek any other ? "

These letters require no comment. They show in an unmistakable manner the progress which Eugénie was making in the " science of the saints." But while her soul was expanding under the double influence of solitude and prayer, her body suffered from the recluse's life which she was leading, which was a wholly unnatural one for a girl of her age. M. Combalot could not fail to perceive this when, on his return from Italy, he spent a few days in Paris before hurrying off to preach a Lenten course of sermons at Bordeaux. In a letter to him, dated the 27th February, she reassures him on the subject of her health, and says the doctor whom she had sent for had told her that the palpitations of the heart from which she had been suffering were not caused by anything organic, and that he hoped to put a stop to this and other symptoms which, if neglected, might lead to serious results. She adds, " My father will send me all that is necessary to pick up my strength; only he imagines that it is the solitary life I lead which has made me ill."

It is not astonishing under these circumstances to find that Eugénie's relations became still more urgent in their efforts to tempt her back into the world. M. Combalot was opposed to her going outside the convent on any pretext, but what reason could she allege to her father for refusing his invitations when he was perfectly aware that she was bound by no vows and living at a convent as a lady-boarder ? It was in reference to one of these attempts that she writes as follows (8th March) :

" What would you have said, my dear Father, if instead of coming out from a sermon I had been yesterday to a play ? I can see you at this distance frowning at the very idea of it. If I were mischievously inclined I would keep you in suspense for a few moments, but I should not like you to think it is

possible for a minute. Only, never was I more tormented, nor was I ever obliged to assert myself more strongly. This is what happened: my father's servant brought me a letter from him announcing his approaching departure on a matter of business, and asking me to go and say goodbye to him before Saturday. I went at once, but unluckily I hit upon a day when my people were going to a theatre; the party consisting of a lady, my brother, and my uncle de Franchessin. You can easily imagine therefore the orders to accompany them, the appeals, and raillery to which I had to submit. One would have imagined, to hear them, that the play had been composed expressly for my benefit! Till the last moment they left me no hope of getting back, as I could not return alone. In the end, finding that they would only get me there by using force, they let me go, but not without telling me I was foolish, absurd, my behaviour a true instance of feminine obstinacy, etc.; the same epithets being freely bestowed on my poor unknown director. As for me I escaped like a bird from a net, and was full of joy to find myself once more behind my grille. What makes for my happiness is that our Lord gives me the grace of taking pleasure in my solitude. When I return to it I have an indescribable feeling of elation. I feel all the more grateful for this mercy, as all who know me are astonished at my being able to stand it."

A little later (14th March) Eugénie writes that her family are beginning to look upon the life of seclusion she was leading no longer as a foolish fancy, and were getting alarmed both about its continuance and her health. They now changed their tactics. "My father and brother and my uncle de Franchessin show me every mark of affection, and I find this a much more trying method of attack than the previous one of ridicule. They are getting anxious about my health, and insist on taking me, anyhow on Sundays,

to the country in the neighbourhood of Paris. Then when I am with them they ask me what they have done to me, why should I leave them, what have I to complain of? And all supernatural motives being incomprehensible to them, what could I say? . . . At such times I find a strength in my vow of obedience which is proof against anything, and I say with St Francis that I am in your hands, and that I will neither go nor act contrary to your will, and obedience to you, because you are my master governing me in the name of Jesus Christ. I would rather die of grief, suffer all imaginable mental pain, than separate myself from Jesus Christ, whose faithful servant and devoted spouse I hope to become . . . it appears to me that I feel truly in my heart that as long as there is nothing in it which offends God, which could add to the sufferings of Christ, or which could displease His Blessed Mother, the rest does not matter, and I am satisfied."

Torn in two between her director's orders and her father's wishes, Eugénie expostulates (as we see in the following letter) in a manner which shows her good sense and her grasp of the situation.

"How can you expect me to go on always refusing? What can I answer when my father and my brother leave their affairs to come and fetch me in this out-of-the-way region? That I must put my rule of life before everything? But this rule is only by way of being self-imposed, therefore it leaves me practically free. If I plead as an excuse the necessity of retreat from the world, in order to try my vocation they tell me that if I have not yet made up my mind I am mad, and absurd, and worse still, to sacrifice my family to a dream; and if I say that I have, they ask me what Order I have chosen, and then I have to be silent. I believe it would be very good for my spiritual progress if I were relieved from the pressure of such ties, and if it was no longer necessary for me to see my family and obtain their consent and support; but as long as I do

not belong to an established Order, I belong, at least morally, to my people. I wish very much that you would consent to let me enter a novitiate a long way from Paris and in an established convent, supposing that it was permissible to enter one without having the intention of remaining there. This would teach me many things and would begin to make the separation between me and my family a serious one. I learn Latin and English here, but nothing about the religious life."

This was not the first time, we are told, that Eugénie begged to be allowed to enter a novitiate of an established Order. Her common-sense told her that it was necessary to learn how to obey in order to command ; that monastic traditions are not things to be improvised, and that it is necessary to see a Rule in working-order to grasp its spirit, its difficulties and its advantages. If M. Combalot hesitated about agreeing to Eugénie's request, it could only have been on account of his fear that after undergoing a novice's training at a religious house she might succumb to what he would assuredly have believed to be a temptation of the enemy : that of asking to be received into it. Meanwhile M. Milleret was getting more and more anxious about his daughter's health, and, backed by her doctor, insisted on taking her either to the Pyrenees, or to Aix-les-Bains. The hand of God can be traced in the sequel. For the idea suggested itself to M. Combalot that if he could gain the consent of the Visitandines of Côte Saint-André to allow Eugénie to make her noviceship there, M. Milleret might fall into the plan with the idea that his daughter's health would benefit by the mountain air of Dauphiné, which could be counted upon to complete the cure of the waters of Aix. The community of Côte Saint-André had the reputation of being an exceedingly fervent one, and the chaplain, M. Pion, was a personal friend of M. Combalot. Events justified M. Combalot's

hopes and expectations. The Visitandines gave their willing consent to his proposal, and M. Milleret came round eventually to his views.

The father and daughter started for Aix early in July. Eugénie announces their approaching departure in the following letter :

" M. Catois [her doctor] urges me to start, and I expect great results from the journey, which my father is going to make as agreeable as possible, and which will be prolonged into Switzerland. My family are sanguine about the effect which this change will have on my ideas ; and as my bad health would favour their wish to see me renounce my vocation, I feel I must do my best to profit by all the care they lavish on me—with, however, a very different object in view."

A meeting, which had been arranged sometime previously, took place at Aix between M. Milleret and M. Combalot and his friend the Abbé Pion. It was a very friendly one on all sides, and M. Milleret's consent having been gained, Eugénie took leave of her father early in August in order to enter the novitiate of Côte Saint-André. She wrote as follows to her director from Grenoble. The letter is dated 6th of August 1838, and is the last written by her from the world.

" My dear Father, I have just been to Holy Communion, and not for a long time has our Lord made His presence felt in my soul so clearly as He did to-day. I was drawn to consecrate myself once more with all my faculties and all the powers of my soul to the Blessed Virgin, so that they might be employed for evermore for her glory and in her service. I have implored our Lady and our Queen to give us some share of that perfect love she had for our Saviour ; and by the graces of which God has made her a depository that she would transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. I made this prayer with great joy and confidence. Oh ! how strong is the soul, when our

Lord comes and raises her up, and carries her and fills her with Himself: how she aspires towards the goods of eternal life. There are no heights to which she does not then hope to attain, and she forgets her feebleness in the participation of the infinite power of Him who makes Himself one with her. Christ is the Spouse of my soul; I wish to love Him alone. I long to learn how to please Him, and to try to make myself worthy of His divine love. I aim at severing the last ties which bind me to the world; but I am deceiving myself, it appears to me, in calling them the last—the real ties are those within me, and these I shall take with me into my solitude. But this will be my life-long work, and I am sure at least that it will be easier for me to struggle faithfully to attain it at Côte Saint-André. I desire during the next few months to acquire the habit of recollection and to banish from my mind all that could make me unworthy of union with my Divine Spouse."

CHAPTER IV

"To obey, to be humbled, to gain eternal life."
St Ignatius' definition of the religious life.

EUGÉNIE'S entrance into the community of the religious of the Visitation marked a fresh stage in her existence. The chapter of her life in the world was closed: that of the cloister opened to her. In doing so, she was to a large extent facing the unknown; for we are constantly struck in reading passages from her diary and from her candid admissions in her correspondence with her director, that she knew nothing of the religious life. What, therefore, were her qualifications, not only for the stupendous task of forming a new Congregation in the Church, but of imbueing it by word and example with a distinctive religious spirit which would enable it to stand the test of time, is a question which must be answered before we go any further.

I think it may be said without fear of contradiction that the leading feature in Eugénie Milleret's character was courage. St Teresa, a great authority on matters spiritual, was accustomed to say that nothing was more necessary for the service of God than courage. And if we turn to the Gospels we find this maxim confirmed on every page of them. We may take Zaccheus and the young man "who had large possessions" as instances of courage or the want of it. The example of Zaccheus is especially illuminating from more than one point of view. Let us take the salient ones mentioned by the Scripture: that he was a chief of the Publicans, a class hated by the Jews, and that he was low of stature. At what a disadvantage was he therefore amongst the crowd which followed Jesus! But nothing would deter him, and he climbed a tree that

he might see Him, "for Jesus was to pass that way." And when Jesus was come to the place, looking up, He saw him, and said to him "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house."

Already Zaccheus had shown great courage, both in facing the ridicule and sneers of the crowds, and,—much more—in obeying the inward voice which spoke to him as it did to "Peter and Andrew, his brother," to Magdalen, and to all the others "publicans and sinners," saying "Come." But greater still was the courage he displays when standing he said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man of anything I restore him fourfold." It was this courage, this readiness to make any sacrifice at any cost, which was wanting in the young man who yet had kept the commandments from his youth, and upon whom our Divine Saviour had cast a look of love. To have been specially singled out in this way by Jesus, and to turn away from Him—could life have in it anything sadder?

Let us look at Eugénie in the light of these examples. In the first place, one of the most marked features of her life was that she had from her early childhood to fight her way against opposing forces. Up to the last she had stood alone. True, the proportions of her troubles were not on an heroic scale; nevertheless they were very real. For what could be more trying for a loving nature (and Eugénie's nature was essentially a loving one) than to be always in opposition? And to be opposed, as she was, on matters dearest to her heart by those she loved best? And hers was no headlong courage; it was prudent and deliberate. She counted the cost of the sacrifices she was making; and then, having weighed them in the balance of eternity, she unhesitatingly—God's grace concurring—made them.

Another marked characteristic of Eugénie was her

prudence. It was the possession of this virtue, and the strength of mind she showed in being ready to "break with wisdom and determination all the ties that bound her to the world," which convinced M. Combalot that she was the predestined cornerstone of the work of the foundation of the Congregation of the Assumption She had also a deep sense of her own unworthiness and deficiencies; another proof, and one perhaps greater than any, that God had designs upon her. To these dispositions she joined, on entering the novitiate, a great goodwill to submit to all the trials that would be required of her in the name of holy obedience. For it is principally by means of that virtue that the soul attains to the transformation which it is the whole object of religious training to effect: that of being changed into the likeness of her Divine Model—an aim, which when perfectly attained, as in the case of the saints, enables them to say with the great Apostle, "I live now, not I but Christ liveth in me."

The first letter Eugénie wrote to her director from Côte Saint-André is dated the 15th August.

"At last, my dear Father, the convent grille is closed upon me, and instead of the distress of mind which you dreaded for me, I experience a true joy at entering the house of my God, which already seems to me more than any other my Father's house. The nuns have received me with open arms. You could not have wished for greater cordiality, kindness and care for me; and already I feel the difference there is between this convent and the one in Paris. I owe much to M. Pion for having recommended me as he has done; M. Petit has also been very kind; and my father has been much touched by it. He has the greatest confidence in M. Pion, and has confided me to his care with regard to all my requirements, and even to his authority over me. Believe me, my dear

Father, I shall be very happy here. I shall try to profit by the holy examples which surround me, by the advice which will be given me, by my more frequent Communions, by my solitude, and in short by all the helps of divine grace.

"To-day is our great day, and I have not mentioned it! Is it not nevertheless very consoling to think that the first day I spend here should be what is pre-eminently *our* feast—the day which celebrates the glory of our heavenly Mother? Last night on going into the chapel, I offered myself to God as a true novice—begging of Him to give me the heart of a spouse of Jesus Christ by making me die utterly to myself. I renewed my vow up to the feast of the Nativity of our Lady; after that I Communicated and I placed my promises, my resolutions, our future, and the hope of our mutual perfection under our Saviour's protection.

"My letter was interrupted by the arrival of a nun to take me to recreation. I am treated as one of themselves and am received everywhere. Their kindness touches me to the heart."

Mother Thérèse Marmonnier was at the head of the community of Côte Saint-André in the year 1838. She confided the care of the young postulant to Sister Marie Caroline, a holy and experienced religious, who exerted herself with the same earnestness to instil the spirit and virtues of the cloistered life into Eugénie as the latter displayed in trying to acquire them.

A letter written many years later by one who was at that time superior of the Visitation at Côte Saint-André shows the community's opinion of Eugénie while she was in the novitiate. After remarking that Sister Marie Caroline erred rather on the side of strictness than over-indulgence, she says, "But the soul confided to her care was endowed with a no ordinary courage and virtue, so that in spite of natural repugnances Sister Marie Caroline ever found in her the same obedience, simplicity and humility. Mlle

Eugénie was the edification of the whole community, not so much from any salient point in her behaviour, but for the care she took to perform well all her actions. By her angelic piety, her equability, her pliability, her serenity of soul, and self-forgetfulness, she was insensibly advancing towards that perfection of which St Francis de Sales is the personification, and which is never reached without many struggles and consummate virtue. Her demeanour in the church was noticeable for its reverence and recollection, and it plainly showed the love and faith of this angelic soul for our Lord whom she received almost every day in the Blessed Sacrament. Everything that concerned this august Sacrament had an attraction for her, thus she loved to assist at the preparation of altar breads, and the holy reverence she showed whilst so employed is still remembered by those who witnessed it.

"It was during our recreation, which she loved and which she animated with her presence, that Eugénie gave free play to her naturally high spirits. She laughed so heartily that, in the opinion of an Augustinian nun who had retired in her old age to our monastery, she exceeded due limits, and in her rather exaggerated view of what was fit and proper she reproved Eugénie for this imperfection. The docility of the novice caused her to profit at once by this admonition, so that the reserve she afterwards adopted was soon remarked. When cross-examined by our venerated Mother Thérèse Marmonnier on the change, she told her frankly the reason, and our good Mother hastened to reassure her and to beg her to resume her former gaiety. . . . From her youth Mlle Eugénie had always had a particular gift for speaking about God, and for the eight months, or thereabouts, during which we had the consolation of possessing her in our monastery she edified and warmed our hearts by the piety of her conversation, the ordinary subjects of which were the life of our Lord, the Gospels and the

holy Scriptures. How we should have wished to keep such a rare treasure amongst us! but the wise Novice-Mistress soon realised that God destined her for another mission; and far from contesting His designs upon her, Sister Marie Caroline seconded the work of grace in her soul. Never did she seek to influence her, or to turn her away from the object she had in view, in spite of the profound esteem she had for her virtue and of the ardent desire she would have had to see her settled in our community."

The correspondence which Eugénie kept up with her director during the time she was at Côte Saint-André enables us to catch a glimpse at what was going on at this time in her soul. In one of these letters, after describing the great longing she had for frequent Communion, so that it appeared to her that rather than renounce it she would renounce life, she goes on to speak of the interior recollection God asks of her. "How I wish I could be faithful to this practice! The secret of doing good is to annihilate oneself before God in all one's actions, to offer them to Him, to seek from the interior voice of the Holy Ghost the words one ought to say, the advice one should give, so as never to speak without giving faithful attention to the promptings of divine grace. Unfortunately, my soul is wanting in simplicity. Self-love, and the thoughts to which it gives rise, mingle with all my actions, and the more clearly I see this, the more I allow myself, at times, to be pre-occupied with them—having at the same time a wish to renounce them. What troubles me most is the acute knowledge I have of the little egotistic motives which detract from my good intentions, and which I fear may end by bringing them to nought."

Prayer and study fully occupied Eugénie's time at Côte Saint-André. She was by her director's orders to go through a course of reading which must have occupied all her spare moments. It comprised an

hour to be given to the works of St Thomas Aquinas on dogmatic theology; another hour for moral theology based on St Alphonsus Liguori's teaching; and an hour's study of the Scriptures. In addition she was to give two hours daily to the revision of a book on which M. Combalot was engaged, on devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

St Thomas' writings seem to have had an especial attraction for Eugénie. She describes the impression they made on her in several of her letters; for instance we find the following: "A few days ago I came upon an expression of St Thomas which was so beautiful and contains so deep a truth that it has made a profound impression on me. 'The grace of God,' he says, 'is the seed of God.' This seed of God, with St Paul's definition, *vita aeterna*, enlightens the soul more than would many works on the subject. . . . My studies find their way into my meditations, and I am amazed to see how everything taught me by St Thomas not only becomes part of my interior life, but vivifies and dominates its spirituality. I cannot bear leaning on what is unreal and uncertain, even in those moments of expansion when the heart, speaking 'alone with God alone,' seeks by love to pass beyond all that veils her intercourse with Him. To do this by means of the imagination chills and disquiets me; my soul soars with a greater sense of freedom and security when I am sure of the grounds on which it rests, and when guided by the faith and learning of the Angelic Doctor. I do not know whether it is he or another who has said that wisdom and love are the two wings of the cherubim. This thought pleases me much, and I like to think that after divine love nothing raises the soul to God so much as the knowledge of His works and perfections to the highest degree that man can acquire it here below."

After describing the light thrown on the "terrible question of predestination," as she styles it, by St

Thomas, she says: "As you know, he will not agree that predestination is caused by the merits of the elect, but says that these merits are only the secondary cause of eternal recompense, as they are subject to the first cause of predestination. Accordingly he who suffers, who prays, who possesses the beatitudes—dreaded by so many—of the Gospels, here below, has not merited predestination, but we may see in them marks of God's choice of him, as, at the same time, they are the means of his attaining beatitude and eternal glory. Well, Father, it appears to me that this doctrine, which at first seemed so hard to me, and which I had fought against so long, has yet made me understand, more than all mystic teachings, the love we should bear for sufferings and contempt and crosses of all kind as being the most certain pledge of our hopes and the glorious mark of our eternal predestination. I have made a resolution to receive them more willingly, and I have had a faint intuition of the feeling entertained by some saints; who were afraid when their lives were too pleasant and their paths too smooth."

As regards the practice of recollection, she writes: "Ever since I made my First Communion I have been moved to seek the Divine Presence in my own interior. St Teresa recommends this practice for souls who are easily dissipated; this thought appeals much to me, and my frequent Communions help me to realise that my God abides within me. I have found by experience that it is a marvellously sweet and strong means of getting rid of idle thoughts to replace them by acts of thanksgiving for holy Communion. I have therefore been a little more faithful of late. And what greater consolation than this could I receive?"

The terms of absolute frankness and confidence between Eugénie and her director enabled her, in revising his book, to put some home-truths before him in a manner more candid than flattering. She

writes on one occasion, "I am often astonished at the small weight you attach to the wording of your ideas. I am much afraid that this is your fault as a writer. Your style has no lack of animation, and subject for thought, there is even sometimes a superabundance of matter, but what is wanting is the sequence of ideas, and conciseness, and an effort on your part to trace your ideas to their source, and in strong and simple language. How is it that I understand this so well, and have such difficulty in carrying out my own recommendations? At least I would fain, my very dear Father, persuade you to do this, who could so easily do it if you chose. Pray be faithful to the promise you made me. Revise your book with the utmost care. Cut down all repetitions, and then you will be able to produce something really good and useful which would contribute to the glory of God."

During the autumn of the year 1838, M. Combalot whilst engaged in preaching and giving retreats, lost no opportunity of furthering the scheme which he had so much at heart. With this object he persuaded two friends, M. Sibour (afterwards Archbishop of Paris) and M. d'Alzon to write letters of advice and encouragement to Eugénie. The correspondence between her and M. d'Alzon has been lost, but a passage of a letter from M. Sibour, which contains a warning against too great optimism as to the prospects of the future Congregation entertained by one, at least, of its co-founders, was assuredly not lost on Eugénie.

"If," he writes, "it is right to lean on God and defy and vanquish all obstacles, one must at the same time guard against giving rise to them oneself. It appears to me that prudence in this case is very necessary in order that the plan of a work which will not be understood at once should not be made known too quickly for fear of compromising its success. You must be prepared for having to contend with numberless obstacles. You will have to surmount both the diffi-

culties inherent in the undertaking and the still greater ones which will be evoked by the spirit of opposition and rivalry to which it will give rise; and even by a pious though misdirected zeal. Would it not be the wisest plan to prepare the first elements of the enterprise in obscurity, before launching it on the public?"

It was probably when under the influence of the advice contained in this letter, which was also in agreement with her own opinions, that Eugénie wrote to her director the following letter, dated 23rd September 1838:

"My dear Father, directly I look on our Saviour only, I feel that what would be most perfect in His sight, would be to leave myself entirely in your hands, since I have not the responsibility of a failure, nor that of your reputation as Founder; but as I am so deeply interested both in one and the other, I cannot prevent myself from wishing to insure its success by my prudence, in which—forgive me for saying—I have more confidence than in yours. Or, I should prefer never to have been consulted, not being placed at the head of things, and having no say in anything. . . . But you must forgive me for writing thus, my very dear Father; I am going to try to fill my heart with love of the Cross, and then I shall have faith enough even to walk on the waters if necessary. Meanwhile you are right in saying that I fear criticism and failure too much. It appears to me sometimes that God will not allow our enterprise to succeed so as to teach me to bear the humiliation of having, like the man in the Gospel, begun to build a tower and not being able to finish it. Finally, I have difficulty in dismissing misgivings from my mind whether you are the right person to make a foundation of this kind; and it appears to me that it would be a relief to me if someone else would take charge of the work, in order to create and draw up its rules with your ideas and under your direction. Whilst I am saying all this—which you will assuredly not take

as an inspiration from God — my worldly wisdom finds fault with me for doing so; as it represents to me that it is a stupid thing to wound one's superior's feelings at the risk of what may be the result as regards oneself and when nothing may come of it. But, my dear Father, I am determined to tell you all my thoughts in order that you may combat them victoriously. . . . And do not think that I should ever wish to confide the work to anyone else; I am speaking only of the details of the administration, and the direction of the novices. Above all, I feel that a strong and capable woman would be required to work under your guidance, instead of me who am so weak and have not the powers requisite for the task."

This letter seems to have raised neither misgivings nor resentment in the mind of the excellent Abbé. Nothing could shake his optimism as regards the future of the Congregation of the Assumption, or his faith in her whom he had chosen to be its foundation-stone. During a course of sermons which he had been preaching at Bordeaux, he had come across a family of the name of de Commarque; and with an eye ever intent on the future foundation he had marked down one of the daughters of the house as a possible recruit. It was in answer to a letter of his proposing to transfer the scene of operations from Paris to the South of France, in consequence of his successes there, that Eugénie makes the following sober rejoinder:

"I was much consoled by the letter I received from you to-day from Sarlat. For a moment I was alarmed that you had settled upon establishing us at Limoges or Périgueux. I should not wish it, because I think I see in the improving relations between me and my family the likelihood of being able to start in Paris, which assuredly would in every way be preferable for the novitiate, in which study would take a prominent

place. I should dread our being established for the first time in a provincial town; we are much more likely to escape observation in a large town, and should more easily attend to our studies there. The Archbishop of Paris need not have his attention drawn to us as long as we are living as seculars in our own house; and as soon as the work is consolidated we could despatch a formed band to Périgueux or elsewhere, whereever the Bishop is more well-disposed, and in sympathy with you. . . . With regard to my family I notice from the proposals they make to me and the way they word them, such a strong wish to attract me to Paris that I should not be astonished if they did all that is possible to help us to establish ourselves there,—if it was only to make a start—now they realise how deeply I have this project at heart. It would be a singular mark of Divine Providence if I should find help and protection where I only expected to meet the greatest obstacles. This is what my uncle de Franchessin writes to me: 'Since you do not share my ideas, at least let me know what you wish for; in what I can be of service to you, and in what I can contribute to make the life you have chosen for yourself a happy one.' I was afraid on receiving this letter that it would contain reproaches, or worse accounts of his health. Not at all; it was calmly worded and reassuring. I have reproached myself that I have not brought greater efforts of a simple and vivid faith to bear on this upright soul. Implore the grace of his conversion from God with me, my dear Father. It is especially from that point of view that I am so anxious about his health. My affection for him will never let me be at peace till I can rest on the assurance that he has the Christian's hope of salvation."

It was while M. Combalot was giving a retreat to a community at Bergerac that Eugénie saw an opportunity of adding to her knowledge on the subject of the religious life. "Tell me, I beg of you, my dear

Father," she writes, "the impression the community at Bergerac has made upon you. I wish you would become acquainted a little with the Rule and the habits of their religious life. How is their time divided? What meaning do they attach to poverty and obedience? What line do they take with regard to practices of piety, prayer and the Divine Office? their meals, their relations with their pupils, their Novitiate, their community life? I should like information on all these points, because their customs, if successful in their case, would be more applicable to ours than that of other communities. In short, without inventing Constitutions, we shall have necessarily to draw up a few rules, indicate a line of life and studies—an end to aim at. I know you look down upon all such things as tiresome details, but they constitute the spirit and essence of a religious house. . . . You yourself would find difficulty in deciding upon similar matters, unless you had seen the advantage or disadvantage of the line taken up by those whose experience must be a guide to ours.

"You observe, my very dear Father, that I speak as if we were to begin at once. Pray do not, however, hurry, and above all, promise nothing. I examined my heart yesterday and it seemed to me there was no sacrifice I was not willing to make to follow your leading. I ask sincerely of our Lord that He will humble me, and make me die in every possible way to myself. When, therefore, I make any remark, it is only because you have often encouraged me to do so, and because I think it is in accordance with God's designs that my great reserve and somewhat timid prudence should be associated with your ardent courage. But as far as I am concerned, I should wish, my dear Father, never to express inclinations of any sort, but only to give you, as you permit me to do, reasons for the benefit or inexpedience of the steps to be taken, and I beg of you with all my heart to pay

attention to those only and never to any will or weakness of mine."

This correspondence, which has been given almost in full, as it throws much light on the characters of the director and his penitent, ceased at the end of October, when M. Combalot, having concluded the missions and retreats he had been giving in the diocese of Bordeaux, returned for a short rest to his mother's house. They had here opportunities of meeting, Châtenay, Mme Combalot's residence, being at no great distance from Côte Saint-André. Eugénie's health was still giving cause for anxiety, and Mme Combalot made it a plea when asking permission for the young girl to pay her visits, that she would benefit by the change to country air and habits. It was on one of these occasions that M. d'Alzon, who was then honorary Vicar-General of Nimes, made the acquaintance of the future Foundress of the Order of the Assumption. Many years later M. d'Alzon was staying at Nice, where a convent of the Assumption had been founded which was governed at that time by Mother Marie-Thérèse (Joséphine de Commarque) one of the foundation-stones of the Congregation. M. d'Alzon then occupied the position of spiritual director and adviser to Mother Marie-Eugénie, and was a frequent visitor at the convent. On one of these occasions the superior asked him to describe the impression made upon him by the holy Foundress in these early days of their acquaintance; his remarks were taken down by a member of the community.

The first thing that struck him about her, he told them, was her look of recollection, and a rare appearance of modesty: one which appeared to envelop her from head to foot. She seemed to wish to keep out of the conversation which was going on around her, until M. Combalot, who was anxious that his friend should judge for himself of the charm of her conversa-

tion, drew her into it. The rest we will give in M. d'Alzon's own words :

" Every word spoken by this young girl bore the mark of solid judgment, and of a soul which was not only elevated but accustomed to hold communion with God. I think I hear her now speaking of the manner in which a Catholic sense should be developed in souls. Her remarks were so illuminating on this subject that I was quite electrified by them, and with one word she revealed to me my own most intimate thoughts on education and the religious life. Everything she said seemed to have been weighed and thought out before God. A plan had been agreed upon for us to make a pilgrimage to a chapel built on a hill at a short distance. I was much struck by the expression on your Mother's countenance whilst reciting the rosary on our way there, and I said to myself that hers was indeed a strong character ; she would do nothing by halves. I had several very serious conversations with her which confirmed me more and more in the conviction that she had in her the materials for a Foundress. Nevertheless, when M. Combalot acquainted me with his plans and told me that he intended to carry the matter through with a high hand, I was seized with commiseration for your poor Mother, and turning to him I said that I only knew of one obstacle to his work. ' What is it ? ' he asked. ' Yourself, my dear friend.' "

CHAPTER V

"Every sort of thing must necessarily revert to its original for its classification." TERTULLIAN.

IN the preceding chapter the name of Joséphine de Commarque was mentioned as a probable subject for the Congregation of our Lady of the Assumption. Though the first recruit, she was not the first to join it: that privilege belonged to two others whose names will be given later. Her story reads like an idyll—a page dropped out of the past, reminiscent of Catholic France before it was polluted by the horrors of the Revolution. It is described at length by the biographer of Mother Marie Eugénie.[1]

At the time of the retreat given by M. Combalot to the clergy of the diocese of Périgueux, there was a young girl living in the ancient manor-house of la Bourlie, which had been in the possession of her family for generations. She was through her mother related to the Montalembert family, and had for some years tried in vain to get leave from her parents to join the Carmelite Order. One evening she received a letter from a young priest from a neighbouring parish who was following the retreat, asking her to come at once to Sarlat, the preacher M. Combalot having an important communication to make to her. Mlle de Commarque's surprise was great as she was unacquainted with him. Her sisters, however, were delighted with the idea, and offered to accompany her. The prospect of the journey seemed quite a stroke of luck to them—a break in their quiet country life; for in these pre-railway days it was in the nature of an expedition to go from la Bourlie to Sarlat; it took a whole day, and

[1] *Une Fondatrice de Congrégation religieuse*, pp. 75-80.

was done on horseback. M. de Commarque having given his consent, the little cavalcade set forth in the highest spirits. The morning after her arrival at Sarlat, on the 30th September 1838, Joséphine received the following letter from M. Combalot at her aunt's house where she was staying. He had learnt (he wrote) that she wished to embrace the religious life and to enter the Order of Mount Carmel, but that her parents had opposed her designs, fearing that her health would not be able to stand the rule of St Teresa. He then informed her of the project he had formed of founding a Congregation under the title of the Assumption, whose object was to be that of giving young girls living in the world " an education which should be thorough and at the same time fundamentally Christian." " As for me," he went on to say, " I consider from the information which has reached me of your character, piety and so forth, that you would be eminently suitable for seconding our pious purpose. I offered up the Holy Sacrifice for you this morning, and it appears to me that considering the times we live in, you would procure more glory to God, to the Church, and to our Blessed Mother in a Congregation which unites the contemplative life with a true apostolate, than you would in a purely contemplative one."

Mlle de Commarque was both struck and perplexed by this letter, and on consulting the Rector of the Cathedral, he said without a moment's hesitation: " You must talk about it to the Abbé Combalot." The latter had spoken in such a manner of the work he was engaged upon in the course of the retreat he had been giving that no one doubted that it was in full swing. Mlle de Commarque having asked if the Congregation numbered so far many members, " Oh, certainly," he said, " possibly a couple of thousand."

Accordingly the interview took place. M. Cambalot spoke of the objects of his undertaking with that tone of conviction and enthusiasm which was charac-

teristic of his nature and to which his powers of persuasion owed their success. Mlle de Commarque, who was already much impressed by what she had heard, then bethought herself of consulting Mgr Gousset, the Bishop of Périgueux, who was that time at Sarlat taking part in the ecclesiastical retreat. The Bishop, like the rest, had been carried away by the good Abbé's fluent oratory. He had also a deep knowledge of the wants and miseries of the times in which he lived. "Education," he told the young girl who asked his advice, "is the most important factor of the present day. It is women who form society; for this reason they should possess a thoroughly Christian training, and their religious instruction should be developed as much as possible. As to what concerns yourself, this is my opinion: the will of God, as regards religious vocations, manifests itself in various ways, and the opposition of your family, which is an eminently Christian one, to your embracing the rule of Carmel should be a sign to you that God does not call you to it. I repeat that the work that the Abbé Combalot wishes to found appears to me very necessary in these days, and to be well thought out; I think therefore that you would be doing something very pleasing to God if you devoted yourself to it."

This answer carried great weight with it, for Joséphine de Commarque had perfect confidence in her bishop. Was it known to M. Combalot? Possibly, but he did not need it in order to exercise his authority over souls. That same evening he sent for Joséphine, and after having spoken to her about the work he had in hand, in the spirit of prophecy which never failed him, he suddenly said to her: "Go down on your knees and promise God you will give yourself up to this work." Joséphine, who has left a record of the scene, adds these words: "I obeyed unresistingly, and gave the promise which was asked of me. He then blessed me and said: 'Now, my child, you belong

entirely to me, and God will make use of you for His glory.'"

But there was also her family to be considered; and Joséphine asked herself how she was to acquaint them with the promise she had made. Accordingly, on rising from her knees, she said: "Father, no better pleader could be found than yourself. We are leaving to-morrow. Come with us, and explain matters to my parents. They will take the news better from you than from anyone else." The proposal was accepted.

The next morning the party started at an early hour on horseback; it consisted of the Abbé accompanied by several priests who had followed the retreat, and Mlle de Commarque and her sisters. The cavalcade was numerous, and they sang hymns as they rode along. "M. Combalot and I rode side by side, and, as far as it was possible, a little in the rear of the caravan," Joséphine relates, "in order to be able to converse with greater ease. He talked so piously! and then he told me all about Mlle Eugénie. It was only then that I realised that nothing had been begun and that she was the only nun whom he had in view. The "two thousand" had indeed dwindled down! But that did not shake my confidence. I felt that Providence had taken me in hand and was leading me."

M. Combalot's interview with Joséphine's parents was satisfactory. In their relief at finding that she was prepared to give up her idea of becoming a Carmelite, they were ready to assent to any plan, especially to one which did not commit either her or them to any definite or immediate action. Eugénie, at the Abbé's instigation, wrote at once to welcome Joséphine with the "sweet name of Sister" into that loving bond of fraternity which binds souls together whose single object is that of serving their Divine Master. Joséphine answered in the same strain; telling her how she longed to join herself to her in order to bring "her submission, her good-will, and her ardent desire

to love God and work for the salvation of souls." She then adds with touching humility and simplicity, "I must tell you that I am twenty-seven years of age, that I have never done any work; and that never having left the paternal roof or lived anywhere except in the depth of the country, or studied more than pleased me, my education is practically nil. After one has passed a certain age, as you are well aware, one is not capable of learning much, and it took all our Father's power of persuasion to convince me that I could be of any use in seconding your work. I leave myself therefore entirely in his hands and yours; and after claiming your kind indulgence, I think I am able to say that I can bring you one virtue, very precious in religion, which is that of obedience, and that I shall ever be a tenderly submissive daughter to you."

Eugénie writes in return, "*Maria assumpta est.* You are the first with whom I make use of this motto: henceforth it shall be my watch-word. To honour our Lady's glory on the day of her Assumption; to reanimate our courage and our hopes by this mystery in which (if we are faithful) she would have us participate; to learn like her to rise from virtue to virtue according to the grace that is given to us; to lay the foundations of our heavenly glory by the imitation of that profound humility which, according to St Bernard, was the sole cause of her elevation to the throne of the universe; finally to work at raising the children who will be entrusted to us above the littlenesses, the capriciousness, the vanities so common to our sex: these should be our objects in life."

The winter of 1839, which was spent by Eugénie in acquiring the religious spirit and practising the virtues of the religious life at Côte St André, was spent by her director as usual in scouring the country, preaching and giving retreats. In the end of January he went for a few days' rest to the college at Juilly which his friend M. de Salinis had taken over from the Oratorians,

and, in concert with the Abbé de Scorbiac, had turned into a centre for the higher studies. He was so attracted by what he saw there that he at once wrote to Eugénie to propose that the new foundation should be made at Thieux, a neighbouring town, whilst he, at M. de Salinis' invitation, would take up his abode at Juilly. To this scheme Eugénie saw many objections, which were shared by M. de Salinis. Her answer is dated 2nd February.

" The very day on which you wrote the letter which I have just received, my very dear Father, I was revolving the same questions as those which occupied you, and I was asking myself (as you appear to have been asking yourself) whether you would be able to carry through the work in spite of the difficulties and self-sacrifices inseparable to the creation of a religious Congregation. It would be well to give this matter full consideration before beginning, as afterwards it will be too late. It is for you therefore, not for me, to reflect upon it at the feet of our Lord and of our Blessed Lady, since it belongs to you alone to solve definitely the question. I will merely place some observations before you on the plan of co-ordinating this work with the projects which you wish now to adopt. For you to live at Juilly whilst your work of the Assumption is started in Paris would present no difficulty if you would bind yourself to come once a week to hold a Chapter, which could not be done by me whilst I am in the novitiate. I ought for a long time to come to be amongst those who humble themselves there, and not as one presiding over it. This weekly visit would be necessary to encourage your daughters, who, you may believe it, will have their share—a large one—of trials. For, studies carried on in solitude ; an uncertain start ; a company meeting one another without precedents to go upon and without a formed spirit ; all these things are a heavy burden to carry. And in addition the noviceship is every-

where a time of trial, of uncertainty, of returns in spirit to the world, of pangs of all description.

"Two conditions remain to be fulfilled after the above has been granted, of which I must speak with perfect frankness, because our words now lead to important and definite resolutions. One is that you should set to work to acquire an interior spirit; for Juilly, though its members lead a pious and edifying life, is not a monastery, and in order to form nuns to the religious life, it will be necessary for you to be more or less a religious yourself. The second follows as a necessary consequence of the first; which is that in coming from Juilly you should put away from your mind all the literary and theological plans which you had formed there and all the thoughts that have occupied you in order to shut yourself up in the narrow circle of our duties and consciences; afterwards, in the same manner, to ignore all that you have said and done with *us* the moment you get back to Juilly. Believe me, this is of no small importance. In spite of our studies having the same tendency as that of an ecclesiastical college, there will no less be this difference that as spouses of Jesus Christ we are bound to make our special study of these little virtues whose name is almost unknown outside the cloister: such as interior self-renunciation, simplicity, holy indifference, and many others all of which you know better than I do, since all I know about them I have learned from you. I must own to you that it is from this point of view that I am most afraid of your settling at Juilly. It is on your account that I fear it. I am afraid that with your mind taken up with other matters you will get disgusted with this undertaking which appeared a few months ago to absorb all your thoughts. I fear you will change in your direction of it according to the influence of the successive counsels which may be given you; or else that you will fail in the regularity which you will have to impose upon yourself as a law,

if you wish to form a fervent and regular Sisterhood and not make their subjection a painful one.

If you were willing to promise before God the exactitude which I have described, I should have no anxiety about your settling at Juilly. I should see great advantages in it as regards your health, which is so dear to me. . . . Let us postpone the question of ecclesiastical retreats; I have the strongest objection to them for the first year. It is necessary for the novitiate to have one year of continuous direction, or your daughters will never be yours. Exactitude of observance, unity of direction during that year will alone form the spirit of the house. And if you do not make sure of the good spirit and devoteness of the nuns who are the first to join—of the ones who will form those who will come later, be assured that all will go wrong. I feel I cannot put too strongly my conviction that the success will have to be bought at that price. . . . Believe me, my dear Father, and believe St Francis de Sales who subjected himself to it, busy as he was, and notwithstanding the fact that he possessed an admirable superior already well trained in St Jane Frances de Chantal."

M. Combalot's answer to this letter shines almost as much from its humility and candour as Eugénie's does from its wisdom and insight.

"Why is it, my dear child," he wrote, "that I should put you in the position of being able to reproach me with only too much justice for my frequent changes in my way of looking at things, and my changeableness on subjects which should by this time be stamped on my soul? There is one thing, however, that not even these sad vacillations are able to efface from my heart and that is my unalterable devotion." His opinion of the soul whom God had confided to his care and direction may be seen in the concluding lines of his letter: "I will decide nothing without your concurrence, because I perceive that God has gifted

you with a wisdom which more than anything else binds me to you, and that He is your source of inspiration when listening to the interior Voice which speaks to you in prayer."

There was a moment in the course of the winter of 1838–9 when M. Combalot was led to believe that Mme Albert de la Ferronnays (the Alexandrine of the "*Récit d'une Soeur*") might join the Congregation of the Assumption. The report reached Eugénie, who at once wrote to her director and told him that she could wish for nothing better than to see him accept her as superior and Foundress of the Order. To this M. Combalot made reply :—

"Let me tell you, my dear daughter, that you must absolutely accustom yourself to the idea of being the first and fundamental instrument of our work. Since I have had the happiness of knowing you I have never wavered in my opinion of your wholly providential mission—for so I firmly believe it to be—of helping me to found a family of virgins whom we wish to consecrate to the perpetual love of our Lady."

Nothing came of this rumour, but in the early spring of this year, M. Combalot was able to inform Eugénie that he had found two more vocations for the Congregation. The first was a young girl of the name of Anastasie Bévier, who had been left an orphan at an early age, and was subsequently brought up at a school where religion was not so much denounced as treated as a negligeable quantity. The loneliness of her life forced her to seek comfort in the thought of a better, a higher life; and her reason assisted by study coming to the rescue convinced her of the strong proofs of the Catholic religion. The grace of God did the rest. M. Combalot first came across her in the confessional, and with that curious intuition which he possessed when it was question of vocations, he marked her down as his own, and asked her to visit him at his lodgings. He was then preaching the Lenten course

Mère Thérèse Emmanuel.

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of sermons at the neighbouring church of St Sulpice. This first attempt failed. Anastasie lost the address and dismissed the matter from her mind ; but chance, or (it seemed impossible to doubt) Providence led her into the same confessional, without knowing it was his, shortly afterwards. His first words were :

" Well ! my child, why have you not been to see me ? "

" I lost your address, Father."

Once more Anastasie was told where he lived and told to come at once. M. Combalot received her in his study and lost no time in going to the point, which was that of her religious vocation.

" Father," she said, " I have absolutely made up my mind to choose a teaching Order "—

The good Abbé's satisfaction was unbounded.

" I can offer you what you are in search of, my child. You will study, you will teach yourself, and you will spread the truth in the souls of others."

He then proceeded to explain the object of the new Congregation and the progress that had so far been made in founding it. " You will bear our Lady's name and will be consecrated to the mystery of the Assumption. You will have to learn Latin and (pointing to the great folios on the shelves of his study) to read the works of those eminent Fathers and Doctors of the Church : the Summa of St Thomas, for instance."

" Oh ! In that case I willingly give myself up to your guidance," was the answer of her who was afterwards known in religion as Sister Mary Augustine.

Very few days later M. Combalot was enabled to register another success, and this time it was that of a young Irish girl.

Catherine O'Neill was born at Limerick on the 3rd of May 1817. She could claim a descent from one of the ancient royal families of Ireland. Her mother died when she was only six years of age, and a little

later she was sent first to the Bar Convent at York, and afterwards to the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at New Hall to be educated. It was at the Bar Convent that on Christmas night she made her first Communion and at the same time made a solemn promise to our Lord to consecrate herself to the religious life. At seventeen she was recalled to her father's house, and during the five or six ensuing years she seems to have been more intent on the pleasures of life and the charms of literature (she was a great lover of poetry and romances) than on cultivating her vocation. At the end of that time her home was broken up, owing to business losses of her father, and she and her sister Marianne, who was her inseparable companion, for causes which we need not enter into, left their country and settled temporarily in Paris. It was in the early months of the year 1839 that Catherine O'Neill first heard of M. Combalot as the great preacher who had been engaged to preach the Lenten course of sermons at St Sulpice. She went to hear him, and though only moderately attracted by his style of eloquence, she heard him say something about the re-establishment of the Dominican Order in France, which revived in her the thought of her own vocation.

The rest we shall give in her own words, dictated by her not long before her death to a member of the Congregation.

"On the 22nd of March 1839, the eve of Passion Sunday, I told Marianne that I should want Modeste (their maid) to go with me to Mass at the Carmelites the next day. 'I am sure you are going to confession to M. Combalot,' she said, 'I will go too.' I expected this; Marianne always liked doing what I did. We started accordingly the next morning in time for the half-past six o'clock Mass. After Mass, I entered his confessional, and at the first word I said, I saw him give a little start. I began my confession, he stopped me saying: 'Wait a moment.' Then he appeared to

reflect: I went on, 'Father, give me your blessing.' Again he interrupted me and said: 'Are you married?' This was a searching question and made me think 'Why does he ask me that?' He continued, 'Are you free, independent?' 'I do not depend on anyone.' I continued, 'Father, give me'. . . . 'Stop,' he repeated, 'I have something important to say to you. Come and see me at 47 Rue de Vaugirard at 10 o'clock.' 'But, Father, won't you say now what you have to say?'—'No, come to my house.'—'And what about my confession?'—'You can make your confession afterwards.' I was struck dumb, and left his confessional. I saw others making their confession, to my great surprise, as I could not understand why he treated me in a different manner.

"I returned home, saying to Marianne that I should go out again at 10 o'clock. 'I shall go with you,' was her rejoinder. This I expected, as my sister followed me like a shadow and looked upon me as her peculiar possession, never wishing to leave me.

"At 10 we arrived at the Rue de Vaugirard, and I went in to M. Combalot's study, and he said to me:

"'My daughter, have you ever thought of becoming a nun?'

"'Yes, I will speak to you about it after I have been to confession.'

"'No, my child, there is no necessity for you to confess. God wishes for you. You should become a nun.'

"'But, Monsieur l'Abbé, you don't know me. How can you possibly judge that I have a vocation in one moment?'

"'When you came to my confessional this morning I saw it more clearly than if an angel had announced it to me. You must become a nun, and it is God's will that you should join an Order that I am founding. It is for this reason that I cut you short and told you I wished to speak to you.'

"But you would think me crazy if I trusted to what you say. You neither know my soul, nor my requirements, nor my aptitudes, nor anything about me, and in ten minutes you would decide all about my future.'

"'My child, it is not necessary to know. God wishes it; He requires you for this work which I am going to found.'

"'But what is this work?'

"'It is one of education.'

"'I don't wish for anything of the sort.'

"'That is because you know nothing about the great work of Christian education; you do not understand that it is through women that society will be regenerated. Young girls are given pious practices, but they are not taught to know Jesus Christ. Christ is not revealed to them. They are not taught to see Jesus Christ in all things. *Instaurare omnia in Christo* is our motto, and *Maria assumpta est*, Mary raised above the things of the earth is our model.'

"He then explained to me with a tone of profound conviction, and in words of fire, the objects, spirit and work of our Institute. I was completely vanquished: I did not, however, give in at once. 'Kneel down, so that I may bless you for this work,' he said. Again I struggled against him, but he added with an air of command, 'I speak in the name of God. God wills it. God wills you for this work. Kneel down.' And such was the force of these words to me, that, shaken to the very depth of my being, I found myself on my knees—not daring to resist the will of God which was laid down for me with such certitude. 'I bless you for this work,' he then said, and I felt I had indeed given myself—but in fear and trembling. . . . At last, having recovered a little from my first stupefaction, I began explaining the legitimate grounds which I had for my opposition:

"'In order to be able to judge about a vocation

you must know the person, and you know nothing about me. You did not want, even, to know anything about me before deciding in a few words the whole of my destiny. What confidence can you expect me to have in your judgment ? '

" ' I do not require to know you. It is the will of God which I make known to you.'

" ' That is to say that you want subjects for your work, you meet me, and that is the sole grounds of your decision.'

" ' My child,' he said in a solemn voice, ' you may turn and twist this matter about as best pleases you. It is God's will, and you will have to accomplish it. Cease to make objections : it will happen.'

" He then began to tell me about Mlle Milleret, who was at that time with the Visitandines at the Côte St-André. She was soon after to return to Paris ; ' You will then be able to join her at once,' he added. Again I protested, and the Abbé recommenced the same assurances : ' I speak to you in the name of God ; and if you cause the failure of this work through your resistance you will have to answer for it before the judgment-seat of God.'

" When he pronounced these words : ' In the name of God,' I felt myself bound irrevocably without any power of resistance. I added, however, that I should have to consult members of my family : my father and sister, and that it would be impossible for me to enter his Order so soon. ' Is your sister here ? ' he asked. ' Yes, Father.' ' Very well, I will speak to her.'—' For goodness sake, do not do so ; you would raise the greatest difficulties.' ' Do not fear, let her come here.' He called Marianne, who was in a room close by, and I left her with M. Combalot. A few minutes afterwards he called me back, and to my extreme surprise said with an air of triumph, ' Well, I was sure it would be the case. Your sister gives her full consent to your undertaking this work.' At the

same moment Marianne said to me in English, 'How much should we give him?' 'You see, Father,' I explained, 'my sister understood that it was a question of subscribing to a work of charity.' He at once proceeded to enlighten her: 'No, it is your sister herself who is to join an Institute which I am going to found.' At these words, Marianne gave me a look of profound anguish, and began to lament and reproach me.

"Notwithstanding all this we continued to meet M. Combalot, but one day Marianne having expressed a wish to go to Longchamp on Good Friday he showed great displeasure, saying that such behaviour was unworthy of a Christian. My sister held to her point, and M. Combalot exclaimed indignantly that henceforth he would have nothing more to do with us. This was just what Marianne aimed at: 'Well, Monsieur l'Abbé, we will therefore take leave of you,' she answered. And she carried me off with her joyfully, thanking God incessantly. 'What a blessing!' she said afterwards, 'we are going now to recover our liberty, we shall be able to go to Rome, etc., etc.'

"Matters remained in this state till Easter Sunday. But just as we were getting ready to go to High Mass, Modeste came to our room and told us that the 'great preacher' was there, and asked to see us. It was in truth M. Combalot, who had come to renew those friendly relations with us which had existed previous to our dispute. He accosted us as if nothing particular had passed between us.

"'What, my children, all Paris has been knocking at my door to enquire after me and you are quite indifferent!'

"He had been ill, but we had not known of it; we excused ourselves, and the Abbé assumed the paternal tone which was not altogether agreeable to poor Marianne. She foresaw that the happiness we had lately enjoyed was again menaced. M. Combalot

spoke of his great work just as he had done previously with the air of counting absolutely on my co-operation, and saying that he was most anxious that I should join Mlle Milleret, whom he expected in Paris towards the middle of April.

"I felt myself vanquished. I could not pronounce myself decidedly before Marianne, but M. Combalot understood that he could count upon me, and went away satisfied."

The opinion we form on the proceedings of this remarkable, and—we need not fear to add—holy priest, will depend wholly on the point of view from which we look upon him: whether as a seer, a director of souls, or that of a simple child in character if not in years: one who had never attained to anything that could by any stretch of the word be called worldly wisdom. For a child he was in his simplicity, his humility, and the waywardness of his character. Might we not suggest that it was in this light that God beheld him, and so beholding, made use of him as He does of the weak things of the world to confound the strong, so that no flesh should glory in His sight? And if we should try to penetrate a little deeper into the ways of Divine Providence, we might perhaps discover that it was just this simplicity and single-mindedness in M. Combalot's character which enabled him to surmount difficulties which in men less endowed with these qualities would have proved insuperable.

In his selection of Catherine O'Neill from the numbers who frequented his confessional, as one of the foundation-stones of his Congregation and as a co-worker with Eugénie Milleret, it is difficult to deny him some share in the prophet's gaze into the future. Whether he had any intuition of the part she was to play in the newly-founded Congregation, or not, we cannot say. But looking back upon it, fron the stand-point of the present day—that is close on a hundred

years later—we can hardly exaggerate its importance. During the difficult times when the little bark of the Assumption put out to sea, having dropped its pilot and with no chart or compass but God's will to steer by, her strong character was no mean asset; and her loyalty to her superior and confidence in her contributed, as few other things could have done, to getting the boat into port. And when later on divine grace had done its work in her soul, changing and transfiguring it utterly from the natural to the wholly supernatural state, what an example hers was to those around her of holiness, detachment, and closest union with her Divine Spouse! Moreover, it was especially in her office of Novice Mistress, which she held for nearly half a century, that her influence was felt in the formation of the spirit of the Congregation, then at its birth. It may truly be said to have been second only to that of the Foundress.

CHAPTER VI

"Think not God exists to make thee happy. God exists for Himself, and thou wilt find happiness only in giving thyself wholly to Him." ARCHBISHOP SPALDING.

THE birth of our Saviour at Bethlehem, His Mother and St Joseph outcasts, and obliged to take refuge in a stable : such has been the divine example on which all beginnings, great or small, of works for God's glory have been modelled since the beginning of the Christian era.

The Portiuncula, or little portion, a tiny hut now enshrined in a vast Cathedral was the birthplace of the Franciscan Order. St Clare's counterpart of it at S. Damiano was equally wretched—minute ! a hovel suitable for beasts rather than a habitation for human beings. St Teresa, having built the little convent of St Joseph, Avila, despaired, almost, of finding space in it for the different exercises appointed by the Rule. While she was debating the question our Lord appeared to her and rebuked her, and told her to begin as best she could. Thus enlightened, she looked again, and this time was rewarded with success. Such also were the beginnings of the Order of the Visitation, of the Sisters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul : in short, the difficulty would be to find exceptions to, not examples of, the rule. What makes the fact more remarkable is that in many of these cases there was no reason, humanly speaking, for the destitution in which these great Orders and Congregations were founded. Their Founders, in all the instances we have mentioned, belonged to the influential, and in some cases to rich families ; but Providence appeared to overrule every circumstance and event connected with them, so that

their beginnings should be alike: that is, abject, poverty-stricken, contemptible in the eyes of the world.

It need not surprise us, therefore, that Eugénie Milleret, on arriving in Paris in the middle of April 1839, had nothing to offer the companions whom M. Combalot had found for her except a welcome. His powers of persuasion, however, were so successfully used in their behalf (a pious widow, Mme Olivier offering to pay the rent of their first house) that by the end of that month they were provided with a roof over their heads.

It was on the Feast of St Catherine of Siena that a little community of three, consisting of Eugénie, Anastasie Bévier, and Joséphine Néron,[1] met and began their religious life, after a preparatory retreat given by M. Combalot. Their day was divided between prayer and study, and a scrupulous regard was paid to silence, except during the time allotted to recreation. M. Combalot came almost daily to instruct them on the duties of the religious life, and once a week, he held a Chapter. Joséphine de Commarque, who, if she had been allowed, would willingly have been of the number of those who assembled in the Rue Féron, was kept back by her parents. Mme de Commarque, before allowing her daughter to join them, had made enquiries through a friend, about the opinion held of M. Combalot at headquarters. The answer made by Mgr de Quélen, the Archbishop of Paris, was that M. Combalot was an enthusiast, devoid of common-sense, and that he would never be allowed to establish a new Congregation in his diocese: moreover, that the work did not, and never would, exist. Joséphine, however, succeeded in persuading her mother that there were good reasons for keeping the foundation secret till it had taken shape and justified its existence. She also had a firm friend in the Bishop of Périgueux, who advised Mme de Commarque to allow her daughter

[1] Joséphine Néron fell into bad health and did not persevere.

liberty to obey God's call. It was not therefore till some months later, on the 5th of October, that Joséphine was free to follow her vocation.

Catherine O'Neill laboured also under a difficulty, that of parting from her sister, who clung to her like a drowning man to a plank. For a long time Marianne followed her sister twice a day to the Rue Féron; in the morning for an hour's lesson in Latin, in the afternoon for a course of instruction given by M. Combalot. On one occasion they were asked by Eugénie to join the little community at their midday meal. This was too much for Marianne; she foresaw that very soon the severance between her and her sister would be complete, and this threw her into such a state of anguish that Catherine for a moment resolved to renounce her intentions: "After all," she said to herself, "it is my happiness which I sacrifice, but I can dispense with being happy, and I should not be so if it was at the expense of others." She was writing to Eugénie when her sister returned. "To whom are you writing?" she asked. "To Mlle Eugénie," the others replied, "I am writing to say that we shall not dine with her, and that I renounce her work." "No!" exclaimed Marianne, taking hold of the letter in order to tear it up, "it shall not be said that you have renounced your happiness on my account: I will join the Assumption myself."

Marianne's impetuous proposal came to nothing, but she was in earnest in wishing that her sister should be happy in her own way. From that time she ceased to oppose her, and Catherine saw the hand of God in the removal of the greatest obstacle that lay between her and her vocation. That it was a call from God she could not doubt; for every time that she thought of giving it up, she seemed to hear a voice saying to her: "If it were your will you might, but it is Mine."

The feast of St Anne, July 26th, was the one chosen by M. Combalot, on which Anastasie Bévier and

Catherine O'Neill were to pronounce their vows of obedience to M. Combalot. The following is the account given of it in Mère Marie Eugénie's Life :

" Anastasie promised to go wherever she was ordered by M. Combalot. Catherine, with a little more insight into the religious life, vowed interior obedience to God and submission of judgment. ' What did you put into your vow that pleased our Father so much ? ' asked Anastasie, ' I promised to follow him to the end of the world and he showed no sign of pleasure.' She was right—M. Combalot beamed with satisfaction : ' Now, my daughter,' he said, ' you belong to me utterly.'—' No, Father,' she answered, ' I belong to God.' The pride and at the same time elevation of soul which underlaid this remark was visible in her and in her countenance. She had a look of dignity which at times amounted to haughtiness.

" ' When Kate O'Neill came to visit us at the Rue Féron,' Eugénie noted in her private journal, ' there was something in her air of pride and her beauty which alarmed me about her. She had the appearance of an angel, but of one who wanted but little to become a rebel angel.' " Eugénie was at first not much disposed to believe in the vocation of Catherine O'Neill, but before long she realised that there was a capacity for great things in the newcomer, and that God had secret designs upon her.

The months of August, September and October were spent by the little community at Meudon, in a cottage taken by Eugénie. Here they were joined, on 4th August, by the two sisters and their maid. So great was Eugénie's fear that the news would leak out sooner than was advisable that a new religious Congregation was in course of formation, that we are told that the entrance of the maid was a signal for them to cease reciting the office of our Lady, which was one of their daily duties.

They now carried out the whole Rule as drawn up

by their Foundress. It was afterwards embodied in the Constitutions of the Congregation with but little change, excepting that of substituting the Divine Office for the Office of our Lady.

But apart from the letter of the Rule, the members of the community had much to learn of its spirit, for it must be remembered that not one, excepting the superior, had the slightest conception of what is involved in a religious training. For instance, Catherine objected to the word "recreation" in the time-table. Why not use that of "free time" instead of the childish word "recreation"? "But," answered Eugénie, "it does not by any means signify a free time. The recreation is a community exercise which is as obligatory as silence, labour, and prayer, and to which we have to bring the special spirit appropriate to it. To pass the time of recreation well is a great art; it is not reached without great virtue."

To Catherine O'Neill the time spent at Meudon was one of constant trial. Her sister, after attempting to follow the religious exercises, wearied of them and of the dull life led by her companions, and sought distraction in visits to Paris. Catherine had one consolation, however, and it increased daily: it was that of the intimacy and confidence of her superior. She was not long in discovering the truth of M. Combalot's words that there were not two women in the world equal to Mlle Eugénie. But to one of the strong, independent character of Catherine O'Neill the yoke of religious observance could not but sit uneasily at first. It required no less than a miracle of divine grace to subdue her nature to it. Many years later Mère Marie Eugénie wrote thus of her: "In the intimacy formed between us at Meudon I discovered that pride reigned in her soul as well as in her outward appearance. Her studies of profane literature had troubled her faith; her too eager reasoning powers made her wish to know the meaning of everything.

She wished for all manner of explanations; and God, who gave me abundant spiritual consolation at that time, enabled me to give her these by putting views of a more general nature before her which served to enlighten her mind. Such thoughts as that all humanity, the Church, the work of Redemption, rest upon the foundation-stone of sacrifice, seemed to satisfy her more than any other, and dissipated the clouds caused by a deceptive human philosophy."

We have a proof that Catherine O'Neill, even at this early hour, was aware of her faults and struggled hard against them in a letter to M. Combalot, which belongs to the time spent by her at Meudon, she writes:

"I have recourse to you, my dear Father, in obedience to Sister Eugénie; I come to humble myself at your feet for my frequent falls and my small amount of fortitude in my troubles. I feel very wicked at times; and though I struggle as much as I can not to give full consent in those moments of interior tumult, I feel that I do not force myself as I should do to renounce the thoughts that foster rebellious dispositions in my soul. I seem to revolt against all exterior influences; accordingly, I resist Sister Eugénie's will, gently expressed though it ever is; I do not apply my mind to my studies; I shut myself up in myself at recreation. I am so self-centred, and so unwilling to sink my individuality, that I constantly take back what I have given to God." Eugénie, in a letter to her director, says of Catherine O'Neill that she has "a beautiful soul," and then, after commenting on the interior trials she was undergoing, she begs him to pray for her that the edifice she had built up of self-esteem on the foundation of what she was convinced was a pure, irreproachable life, may be destroyed through the grace of God.

Joséphine de Commarque came to join Eugénie and her companions in Paris on the 4th of October.

She was met by Augustine Bévier, and in crossing the court where the arrivals from the provinces set foot, the latter fell over a saw and cut her leg in so doing; "What luck!" she said, as she rose from the ground, "it is only my leg, my dress is not torn." This little incident is significant of the poverty of the community at the time of its foundation. Joséphine was confirmed in this impression when she was shown her room: its furniture consisted of a bed, a chair, a statue and a holy water stoup. As a newcomer she was given a mattress, the other Sisters slept on a paillasse.

The superior was at this time looking for a permanent abode in which they could start a school. The Abbé Affre, who was a personal friend of M. Combalot, and a strong supporter of his work, had assured him that if he found a house for his daughters he would undertake to get leave for them to reserve the Blessed Sacrament and have daily Mass in their chapel.

A house was found in the Rue Vaugirard which combined some indispensable requisites for a school: one of which was a play-ground, as it stood in a court, *entre cour et jardin*, and it had also a room large enough to be used as a chapel. Eugénie and her Sisters took possession at the end of October. Their first efforts were directed to the adornment of the room in which our Lord was to take up His abode. It was repapered, an altar painted in white and gold was put up in the sanctuary, and a Gothic window covered with papers of different colours to represent stained-glass was inserted above the altar. Here, on the 9th November, the day of the Dedication of the Basilica of St Saviour in Rome and the Feast of St Theodore, M. Combalot said the first Mass. It is a day which is ever kept in faithful remembrance by the Congregation of the Assumption, as one of gratitude and rejoicing.

In order to emphasize their separation from the world and their own past lives, they took new names, as

is customary with many religious Orders. Eugénie added that of Marie to hers and became Mère Marie Eugénie of Jesus ; Catherine took the name of Thérèse Emmanuel of the Mother of God ; Anastasie Bévier the name of Marie Augustine of St Paul, Joséphine de Commarque that of Marie Thérèse of the Incarnation.

The training to a religious life of the first community of the Assumption may be said to date from this time. Their poverty was no nominal thing, but a fact of which they felt the daily and hourly pinch. For not a single member of it brought more than a young girl's allowance to the general fund, and this, till pupils began to come, had to cover the heavy expense of house-rent. Their obedience was put to a severe test by M. Combalot, who allowed no sort of infraction of the Rule, and exercised them in mortifications of every kind. The Sisters rose daily at four ; prayer and study occupied the greater part of the day, and strict silence was observed except at recreation. M. Combalot gave them lessons in Latin and encouraged them to write commentaries on the Psalms, whilst Sister Marie Eugénie under his direction expounded St Thomas's Treatise on the Incarnation to them. As she had only the Latin text she dictated the translation first, and then followed it up with the explanation. They had begun at Meudon with the recitation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin ; but M. Combalot, when Advent arrived, made the Sisters substitute the Divine Office for that of our Lady as a preparation for Christmas, with the result that they begged to be allowed to continue it during the octave. The octave concluded, they, with one voice, petitioned their director to consent to its being permanently adopted as an integral part of the Rule. Since then the Daughters of the Assumption have never ceased to recite the Divine Office, and have looked upon it as the first of their duties and privileges.

M. Combalot was absent from Paris during the

Christmas of 1839; his daughters attended midnight Mass at a convent of Visitandines in the neighbourhood. He was, however, with them in mind if not in body, as the following letter to Sister Thérèse Emmanuel testifies:

"My dear child, thank you for having opened your soul to me and for having poured out your interior trials to your father and best friend. Do your utmost, my child, to master your fears in these combats, and to despise the scruples you feel as to not having been sufficiently vigilant in resisting them. Never—I say this with deepest conviction—have you offended God on these trying occasions, sufficiently at least to be a cause of the smallest anxiety to you. God does not make account of such things; He looks at the general dispositions of the soul, and do you not desire to be wholly His? Do not entertain desires of sufferings and interior crucifixion either; be a little child, and ask of Jesus the milk given Him in His Sacred Infancy, not the bitter bread of perfect renunciation and death to all things. Jesus lived in Bethlehem before He ascended Mount Calvary. Believe what I say, and impress on your Sisters that the novitiate of the Assumption should be made more in the Crib of Bethlehem than on Calvary. The woundings, the crown of thorns, the desolation of the Garden of Gethsemane, will not be wanting in the evening of the religious life. For the present take your rest with the Infant Jesus in the arms, on the lap, and at the breast of our Blessed Mother.

"The crib is truly a school of poverty, of obedience, of self-renunciation; but if the Infant Jesus is cold He has at least His Mother's kisses to comfort Him; if He is poor she can make up for it by her love; if He is wrapped in swaddling bands, He is also cradled in her virgin arms. The birth of Jesus is therefore a joyful, not a sorrowful mystery. Let yourself be sweetly carried by the Divine Infant, who, little as He is,

carried His mother, more than He is carried by her. Quench your thirst in the sweet sources of piety, of Communion, and of heavenly love. Let us not go too fast; Ah no! Jesus passed thirty years of His life at Bethlehem or at Nazareth; those two holy refuges should be the two great stations of the religious life for my daughters. It is at Bethlehem and at Nazareth that they should seek the small, and hidden, and simple virtues of silence, of poverty, and the spirit of prayer, and it is there that they will ever enjoy the presence of Jesus and Mary and Joseph. The great combats, the furious attacks will come later, but by that time they will have grown—they will have reached the thirtieth year of their perfection. The present time is that of their spiritual infancy; it is necessary to pass through it and live long in it. . . . Let us then start with the joyful Mysteries of the Holy Childhood, and let them be the patrimony of the novices of the Assumption. The prayers of the strong are for the strong; we are but little children. Read all that will lead you most to the love of these divine mysteries during this time. St Francis of Assisi and St Francis of Sales delighted in them. Be therefore, one and all, holily joyful, and peacefully child-like. And as for you, my dear daughter, aim at becoming so even more than your Sisters, in order to destroy in you that inclination which urges you to seek the most arduous and the too difficult things of the spiritual life. . . . Tell your Sisters that my wish is that during the forty days that succeed the birth of our Infant God they should have no other superior than the Divine Babe."

The poverty to which the members of the community had vowed themselves, and to which the force of circumstances contributed, showed itself in many ways during the winter and spring of 1840. In the matter of clothing, as they could not afford to put away the dresses which they brought with them from the world, the only distinction which they could make

from their ordinary secular dress was to crown it with a uniform postulant's cap. The effect produced by this compromise must indeed have been quaint. They had no servants, nor those who in a convent devote themselves to material work: namely lay Sisters. Sister Augustine was the first to be told off to cook for the community. But her tastes were strictly literary—cooking for her was sheer waste of time. So her method (which at least had the merit of simplicity) was to put all the materials for dinner, meat, carrots, turnips and rice, etc., into one pot, and boil and serve them all up together. As this was not considered conducive to the health of the community, her activities were after a time diverted into other channels. A servant was then engaged. She was also, according to the same authority, quite equal to preparing food for nuns who hankered after a penitential diet. "It was then the season of Lent. The Sisters took for their collation a cup of milk at 11 A.M. Claudine regularly every day served up burnt milk; in answer to an observation made on the subject by Sister Marie Thérèse, who was in charge of the commissariat department, she answered: "It doesn't signify, it is only for the *maigres*.' This was what she called those who fasted. The dinner equalled the collation; the beans or potatoes were always burnt. Claudine had no feelings of remorse: it was 'only for the fasters.'

The community received an accession of two more postulants during the early part of this year. Both were orphans. Henriette Halez was born in 1819, and lost both father and mother within six months of each other, when she was thirteen years of age. She was brought up—or it would be more correct to say dragged up—by a guardian who treated her with the greatest cruelty, obliging her to exert herself in a manner which permanently affected her health. She heard of the Sisters of the Assumption through her confessor, M. Combalot. Her guardian refused her permission to

join them, and she was only allowed to do so on attaining her majority in February 1840. The other postulant was called Constance Saint-Julien. She was born in 1822, and having been left an orphan at an early age, was placed by her uncle under the care of the Bernardines of Port Royal, a very pious community who retained nothing of the errors of Jansenism with which their predecessors had been tainted. They were dispersed at the time of the Revolution; that national catastrophe, which swept away much good, swept away likewise some evil, and amongst other things the germs of a heresy which had eaten into the very vitals of the Church of France in the century which preceded it. The Bernardines inspired their pupils with a special devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Conception. Constance Saint-Julien at the age of seventeen received a call to the religious life; and her uncle having consulted M. Combalot on the subject, at his suggestion she joined the community of the Assumption. She took the name in religion of Marie-Gonzague de la Conception, and Henriette Halez that of Marie Josèphe.

These six religious were therefore the foundation-stones of the Congregation: Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus, Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, Sister Marie Augustine, Sister Marie Thérèse, Sister Marie Josèphe and Sister Marie Gonzague, their names and their lives will ever be held in veneration and loving remembrance by the daughters of the Assumption.

We must retrace our steps to 31st December 1839, in order to record the death of Mgr de Quélen, which took place on that day. His successor, Mgr Affre, though he was not nominated to the vacant See till the following May, was appointed Vicar Capitular; and then, as well as later, he proved himself a firm friend of the newly formed Congregation. The experience gained by Mère Marie Eugénie during the months

in which the Sisters lived in community, enabled her, in the winter of the same year, to draw up the Rules and Constitutions with M. Combalot's concurrence, before submitting them to the Archbishop. The Rule, as is the case with so many religious Congregations, was founded on that of St Augustine, provision being made by the Founders for the special requirements of their Institute.

M. Combalot defined its end and character in the following words :

"I have proposed to myself this solution of a difficult problem : It is that of forming a teaching Congregation of nuns who, by means of an enlightened and profoundly Christian education, should seek to introduce the germs of a spiritual new birth into society and family life, by implanting in the mind and soul of young girls the love and knowledge of Jesus Christ. And whether the Daughters of the Assumption leave their prayer for study, or the simple, poor and hidden occupations of the religious life in order to teach, never should they lose sight of Him of whom St Paul said, 'I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ." Again in his introduction, he says, "I have come to the conclusion that in order to arrive at a Catholic system of education for girls of the higher classes, it is necessary for the nuns of the Assumption to gain entrance into the sanctuary of sacred science by sufficient knowledge of Latin to enable them to make use of the treasures of Holy Writ, of theology, and of the liturgy and traditions of the Church. An abridgment of the treatises of St Thomas on God, the Incarnation, and the Sacraments will be daily explained and commented upon for the advantage of the novices of the Assumption for the space of an hour. The history of the Church, the sacred literature of the Bible, and ecclesiastical tradition will keep pace with their theological studies, and each day the nuns whilst in their novitiate

will have a lesson on those subjects. The study of history, geography, and ancient and modern literature will always be pursued in relation to dogma and the history of the Church in such a manner that the souls of the young novices may not be exposed to the danger of losing sight of Him Whom it should be their object to seek first of all."

M. Combalot was absent from Paris during the Lent of the year 1840, preaching a course of sermons at Rouen. On his return he took up once more the direction of the community. Amongst the subjects which occupied his attention and theirs during the course of the summer was that of deciding as to a habit. M. Combalot was strongly in favour of one of a purple colour being adopted, his reason for this preference being that it was on a pilgrimage to Ste Anne d'Auray some years before that the inspiration had come to him to found in honour of our Lady's Assumption a congregation of teaching nuns who were to wear purple as a sign of penance. He wished them to wear in addition a white veil, emblematic of a special consecration to the Blessed Virgin. Mgr Affre preferred black as being the colour commonly adopted for communities of women. Mgr Gousset was also consulted, and his answer was: "There are no nuns dressed in purple; give them the colour worn by bishops," and also, he might have added, the Church's penitential colour. Accordingly Mother Marie Eugénie and Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, acting on this advice, proceeded to make the habits of the little community, now consisting of six members. The habit was made of purple (or violet) material, with a cord of the same colour, a cross in a woollen material was worn on the breast.

Mother Eugénie, writing to M. Combalot, who was engaged in giving a retreat at a distance from Paris, mentions that they were busily engaged preparing the habits for "the great day." She goes on

to remark: "This will interfere a little with the studies, but not at all with the silence, prayer and practice of the Rule. In getting our habits ready beforehand we shall be able to secure more liberty for the eight days' retreat allowed us by our Rule, and which we are very desirous of making well." On the 14th of July, she writes again: "Our Sisters are in the best possible dispositions; never have I seen greater fervour in them. We follow our Rule faithfully, and we try to adhere to its spirit down to the minutest details. Indeed, my dear Father, I am becoming strict, and it fills me with shame when I think that I commit only too often the faults which I condemn. I preach every kind of perfection and ask much of my novices; and all this terrifies me on account of my own shortcomings."

Mgr Affre, who had been consecrated to the Archiepiscopal See of Paris on the 5th of August, fixed upon the eve of the Assumption for the Clothing of the Sisters. They prepared for it by a previous retreat of eight days. Mother Marie Eugénie, in some resolutions made by her during the course of this retreat, shows how deeply she entered into the spirit of what the duties of a superior involve.

"In their needs spiritual and material," she writes, "I must have no will besides the will of God, the rule and the guidance of our superior, I must disappear behind these, and I must speak humbly and gently to all; I must seek to be a pattern of regularity; to be firm in upholding the Rule, not anxious to safeguard outward appearances or my own peace and quiet, but doing all for the greater glory of God. I must labour with all my strength to consider myself answerable to others for every moment, and when I speak to them about their souls, put myself in spirit at their feet and at the feet of our Lord; I must pray without ceasing so as not to deprive Jesus Christ of the praise which I owe Him and in order to obtain His spirit. I should

keep hold of His hand and give Him every spare moment, asking Him continually for that firm and courageous fidelity which I need. In all things I must seek God alone, and gently lead others to do the same; and all this in a profound renunciation of myself, my ideas and my judgments, so that at all moments I should be able to say: 'What does it please Thee that I should do?'"

On the eve of the Assumption, the Archbishop of Paris, accompanied by the Abbé Gros, one of his Vicar Generals, and an Irish Bishop, came to the little chapel of the Assumption convent in the Rue Vaugirard, where the community awaited them. The five novices;[1] Marie Eugénie de Jésus, Thérèse Emmanuel, Marie Augustine, Marie Thérèse and Marie Josèphe, were dressed in plain white muslin, with wreaths of white roses on their heads. After the ceremony of Clothing had been performed by Mgr Affre, M. Combalot preached to them with an eloquence which came straight from the heart, for he saw in that day's event the fulfilment of the earnest desires and unwearied exertions of many past years. We possess a guide to what all were feeling on this great occasion in some thoughts which Sister Thérèse Emmanuel committed to paper on the evening of this day:

"*Lex Domini immaculata.* God's law will purify my soul. I confide myself to it, for I long for the unspeakable beauty of virtue . . . I must belong to God. I must day after day hour by hour, whether I feel feeble or strong, sad or joyful, sacrifice myself sweetly and tranquilly by the help of that grace by which I can do all things, happy in feeling I am His poor servant. Let me recollect myself before eternity which belongs to my Spouse, before the time present which is mine, in order to fill it with one sole and simple

[1] Sister Marie Gonzague was not clothed till the Feast of the Presentation.

effort, one only thought, one only aspiration, a life wholly given to Jesus."

So far the community had found no lay sisters to help them in the manual labour of the house, but in September M. Combalot, while on a journey to the Pyrenees, met two Basque girls who felt a call to serve God in that life, and he invited them to try their vocation at the Assumption. They arrived in Paris on the 11th of October, clad in the costume of their country, of pleated capes, white caps and black cloaks. The lay-sisters of the Assumption wore this dress for a long time when employed on missions outside the Convent. The name of the elder of these Sisters (who were cousins) was Marie Catherine, and the other Anne Marie. The latter had a strong and very original character, besides being young and active. She was of great use to the community in training the lay-sisters who came after her in the duties and labours incumbent on them. She was accustomed to say in after years, "No one will ever know the trouble Mother Thérèse Emmanuel and I have taken to form the Sisters."

Sister Marie Gonzague's youth delayed her Clothing for a few months, but she also was admitted to that ceremony in the same year as the others, on the Feast of the Presentation. The sermon on this occasion was preached by the Abbé Coeur, who later on was made Bishop of Troyes.

The first Christmas spent by Mother Marie Eugénie and her Sisters under these new conditions seems to have been one of special graces and blessing. One soul amongst them was singled out for a very high and intimate union with God in supernatural prayer. His ways are inscrutable. Some—great saints even—He conducts by the ordinary and well-beaten path of virtue carried to heroic heights. Others He favours with supernatural gifts and powers, such as baffle all but the masters of spiritual life to understand or to guide. Such was the case with Sister Thérèse

Emmanuel. From the time of her conversion and reception into the Congregation, God gave her constant marks of His divine predilection, and these went on increasing till the end of her life. Mgr Gay, a great authority on mysticism, said of her many years later, " Never have I known a soul to whom God has spoken so much."

It was on Christmas night 1840 that Sister Thérèse Emmanuel heard for the first time words such as it is not given to all to understand, and the meaning of which is even hidden at times from the privileged soul who is their recipient. Sister Thérèse Emmanuel wished to confide in her superior, but it was with difficulty that she could put into words what had passed between her and her Divine Spouse. This is how Mother Marie Eugénie described what had happened : " I understood that something divine had taken place. It was God taking possession of His creature by one of those graces which transform all their lives ; I then asked the Sister to write down as far as she could put into words the impression she had received. This is what she gave me to read : ' On Christmas Eve 1840, having asked of our Lord with great earnestness that He would enable me to be born again to a new life, I was given a vivid perception of God's designs upon me. A great silence made itself felt in my soul while listening to the words which were addressed to it. Those words spoken to my soul told it that Jesus would be born in it when it became like a deserted stable, the road to which had been lost to men, and which, ruined and open on every side, afforded no shelter from the winds of heaven. During the midnight Mass, from the Gloria in Excelsis to the Elevation, I heard nothing but these words : Gloria, gloria, gloria. My glory belongs to no one. I am My glory. . . . One of My thoughts is My glory. My Word is My glory. What glory can the Infinite take from the finite, the Immense from the limited,

the Eternal from the created ? My glory is complete in My perfections. When God in the plenitude of His being meets the creature within the limits of his nothingness, no relations are possible between them except the annihilation of this being of one day before the being who is from all Eternity. *Substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante Te.* God made me understand that the development of my being for His glory gives Him, so to speak, nothing that He did not possess; but what He cannot take, because He has given it to us, is our liberty. And when a creature gives it back to God she gives Him something belonging to herself outside even His claims over her. God honours this gift greatly, that is to say in the measure of His creature's worth and the extent of her capacity. The glory of God in His creature being derived from her annihilation, the more she offers herself for His glory the more should she humble herself in her littleness, her self-abjection, so as to become a mere nothing, effaced in the presence of men in order to be truly in God's presence, and in His only, and to be there in the abyss of her nothingness. I felt very strongly how far-reaching were these offerings which I made of myself — of my all — into God's hands, so that all He has given to me of being and liberty I give back to Him as glory. Just as these offerings find their exemplification in the sweet, passive and resigned oblation of the Infant Jesus, by a kind of interior affinity, it appears to me that they will also have their accomplishment and consummation in the Cross. My soul is as it were in a manger, in which she starts a new existence."

CHAPTER VII

"Man always in the end pays God what he owes Him. If he does pay Him by doing what he ought, he pays it by suffering as he ought; hence in one way or another his debt is paid."

ST AUGUSTINE.

NEVER had the outlook been more favourable to the Congregation of the Assumption than in the winter of 1840. They had found a powerful ally and friend in the Archbishop of Paris, and both M. Combalot and Mother Marie Eugénie could rely on his support. All that remained to be done, therefore, was that the Rule and Constitutions, after having been formulated by the Founders; should be submitted to the Archbishop for his approval. Mother Marie Eugénie, in a letter to M. Combalot who was giving a retreat at a distance from Paris, dated November 13th, remarks that: "He appears to find our Rule such a grand one (*si belle*) that he gave me the impression of doubting whether we should be able to practise it in all its fulness; and again he said to me to-day: 'We are going to allow you to follow your Rule, but if you take my opinion you will not burden yourselves with everything at once. You will go about the accomplishment of your wishes little by little.' I think you would not have approved of this advice, which is not much in accordance with yours, but I thought I was able to assure him that the Rule had been put into practice since the beginning."

Mother Marie Eugénie was abundantly justified in saying, as she did with her accustomed straightforwardness, that Mgr Affre's prudent advice was little in accordance with M. Combalot's character or opinions. Her biographer, who had the advantage of access to original documents, and the written testimony of eye-witnesses, gives the following account of the

trials undergone by her at this time. "Full of generous impulses, he [M. Combalot] was wanting in prudence and perseverance. He was, in short, one of the best fitted men in the world to conceive a fine idea, and the least fitted to carry it out. His very defects had been of use when he was engaged in bringing together the first members of his Congregation; but they made it impossible for him to do what was necessary to form them or to lay the foundations of a durable work. His life was a series of improvisations, and consequently of continual changes." "Every day," wrote Sister Marie Thérèse, "M. Combalot came to see us with a fresh idea according to the people whom he had met the day before, so that it would have been necessary to change every moment the plan of studies, the rule of life, even down to the Sisters' employments: for the Father entered into the smallest details." Mother Marie Eugénie gave in on all points, and her Sisters followed her example: M. Combalot had bound her to what was practically unlimited obedience. She had no right to do anything without his permission, or to hold a different opinion to his. This was a cause of great trial to her, for the poor Mother found herself often torn in two between her conscience which recommended obedience, and her good sense which, in spite of herself, forced her to differ from M. Combalot. Her humility throughout was admirable. Thus, whenever he addressed an observation to her, she received it on her knees. Sister Marie Thérèse remarked later that she had counted that the Mother had on one such occasion knelt seventeen times. Great though her submission was, however, she could not but feel great anxiety about the work which she had so much at heart. One day in December 1840, weighed down by the constant burden of fear and uncertainty, she ventured on expostulating with M. Combalot. "How do you expect me not to be anxious?" she said; "you will not allow me to consult anyone."

"Whom, then, do you wish to consult?" Mother Marie Eugénie mentioned successively M. Coeur, M. de Salinis, M. Gaume. One after another these names were put aside.

"Would you like me to address myself to the Abbé d'Alzon?"

"But he is two hundred miles from here!"

"What does that signify, since you will not permit me to see any of those who live in Paris?"

"Emmanuel! Well, be it so. You may write to him as much as you like."

Accordingly, Mother Marie Eugénie wrote to the Abbé d'Alzon. Her letter has not been preserved, but we have his answer to it, dated 10th December.

"Madame, I have been reading with the most scrupulous attention the letter which you have done me the honour to address to me, and having invoked the Holy Ghost, this is the answer I think I should make. Your position is a difficult one, but my opinion is that you should retain it till God Himself gives you the means of getting out of it. I agree willingly to the wish you express of writing to me from time to time, and I think I should do well to give you my motives for doing so.

"(1) I believe there are few priests who have as much affection for M. Combalot as I have, though I am under no delusion with regard to his faults.

"(2) Any steps you might take would end by doing an injury to this good Father, and consequently to the community.

"No, you should not leave the success of the work to M. Combalot. You say that those around you count more upon you than on him. Remember what I said to you at Châtenay in his presence. If I had only relied upon him, I should not have encouraged you as I did at that time to go forward. Believe this: that your Father prefers work done to work that has

to be done, and make this a point of departure in the government of the house.

"No, you should not tolerate those things you mention to me. Hold fast to the points of the Rule; it is your right to do so. As for the rest, proceed in a spirit of faith, and let yourself be led. I am aware that you will require great courage to do this, and that such a painful position may, perhaps, before long become unbearable, but for the present moment there is nothing to be done but to wait. It belongs to Providence to unloose your bonds."

Meanwhile the horizon was darkening. For in spite of the friendly feeling evinced by Mgr Affre towards M. Combalot, he could not remain deaf to the reports circulated about him, which though not aimed at his good name, were of a nature to destroy his confidence in him as Founder of a new Congregation. These reports were not slow in reaching Mother Marie Eugénie's ears, and she acquainted M. Combalot with them in a letter which reached him at Nantes, where he was preaching a mission for the Lenten season of 1841.

"Matters look very serious as regards our affairs at present. Each one of the points we have asked for will be narrowly examined. The most serious attack made upon us will be to accuse us, and you also, of being very independent with regard to the Archbishop's authority. I should not even be very much astonished if this has been said to him. For goodness-sake, my dear Father, take care to avoid anything which could corroborate this report; for it is one of the most disastrous that could be made about a community, as our primary obedience is due to the Bishop. We have indeed every desire to submit to all in authority. What the world might say on the subject is pure ill-nature."

Whilst their affairs were hanging as it were in the balance, Mother Marie Eugénie received a letter from M. Combalot telling her to have a copy of the Rule

made out, as he wished to forward it straight to Rome, in order to obtain the Holy Father's approval of it. He concluded by saying that he was sending it to the Pope's confessor, who would place it in his hands. Mother Marie Eugénie was both grieved and alarmed at a proceeding which seemed as much opposed to prudence as to the usages of Canon Law; accordingly she remonstrated in the following terms:

"I hasten, my dear Father, to answer your letter in order to tell you of the fears here to which your wish to send the Constitutions to Rome before they have received the Archbishop's approbation have given rise. Will not the latter be deeply hurt by such a measure? . . . It is impossible that Rome should approve without consulting the Ordinary, and if Mgr Affre, at the very moment when matters are in suspense, and when he has shown a favourable intention to conclude what he has begun in our behalf, hears that we have tried to pass him over and apply direct to Rome, I doubt if he would accord his support to you any longer. On the other hand, considering all the attacks of which we have begun to be the object in Paris, if the Archbishop refused us his protection we should be lost in the general opinion. You know as well as I do what he would feel on hearing of the steps you had taken in Rome. As for us, I must own that we would give everything that these proceedings should only take place later in the natural course of events; that is with the support and approbation of our Archbishop."

It was impossible that M. Combalot should not give in to such incontestable facts, stated in such temperate language; but he did not do so without reproaching Mother Marie Eugénie for her inordinate prudence, and her ever-recurring fears as to the ultimate success of the work.

She writes in answer, "You reproach me at being uneasy too soon at the prospects of the steps you have

thought of taking in Rome ; but do not think, my dear Father, that in such a case I consult my prudence only. The Archbishop is to us a divinely appointed authority, and besides the power he exercises, does not his character alone oblige us to be as submissive to him as to you ? I say this from a conviction born of faith, from which I could not depart. You are right in thinking that I am a prey to anxiety and sadness regarding the future of this work ; the more my duty obliges me to put away these feelings, to dissimulate to the extent of appearing cheerful and confident, the more they weigh upon me. . . . If everything should be destroyed, the trial of a new vocation for each one of my Sisters, the fear that there should be some amongst them who would not have the courage to make another attempt elsewhere, the recollection of the responsibility we have had in bringing them here, and in encouraging them to remain here are a new and ever-recurring trial with which my mind cannot cope, as I find it much more difficult to resign myself to the sufferings of others than to my own."

Very soon after the exchange of these letters between Mother Marie Eugénie and her director, the former had an interview with Mgr Affre, in which he expressed his continued interest in the young Congregation, and his desire that it should grow and develop. He went on to say : " You are not, however, as yet established under a regular authority, and you have a Father whose judgment is not always to be depended upon."—" Alas ! my Lord, if your Grace will permit me to say so, we are even more aware of the fact than you are ; but we are submissive daughters of the Church, and we wish for nothing better than to obey her."

" If such is the case, we can easily arrange matters. When M. Combalot returns to Paris I will tell him that it is desirable that you should come under the regularly established authorities, and that I am prepared to give

you a superior, so that your status should be regularized."

M. Combalot returned to Paris in April, and the Archbishop renewed his proposal to him: "Never as long as I live shall my daughters have any other superior than myself" was his answer.

The remaining chapter of M. Combalot's history we will give in the words of the author of *A Foundress of a Congregation:*

"Ever prompt in his resolution, he instantly had the idea of taking his daughters off to a country house in Brittany, which a rich widow, Mme de la Bretèche, had put at his disposal. He laid this proposition before them, and Sister Thérèse Emmanuel answered in the name of her companions, that the nuns' families would be opposed to such a step which to them would be incomprehensible. Again, could they dispense with the Archbishop's authorization even to leave his diocese? Mother Marie Eugénie had preserved silence; but the Abbé well understood that she shared the opinion expressed by Sister Thérèse Emmanuel. From that moment, he sought to oppose his influence to hers, and to separate the daughters from their Mother. This struggle was a very lamentable one, and nearly proved fatal to Mother Marie Eugénie's health.

"'Our poor Mother declined in health so visibly,' wrote Sister Marie Thérèse, 'that as I feared she would be laid up altogether, I went one day to Sister Thérèse Emmanuel and said to her: "We must choose between our Mother and M. Combalot, as if things go on as they do at present, she will fall ill and die of it." We were then at the end of April; and M. Combalot intended starting for Rome in the beginning of May, and we felt we were bound in conscience to tell him what we thought before his departure. It seemed to be more loyal, and we trusted to the journey to distract his thoughts.'"

He, however, anticipated the Sisters. On the morning of the 3rd of May 1841, the Feast of the Invention of the Cross, after saying Mass in their chapel, he assembled them without their superior, in the community room, and placed before them, this time in positive terms, the necessity of withdrawing from the authority of the Archbishop, and, as an immediate consequence of this measure, of leaving Paris. He asked the Sisters to make their decision on the spot. Sister Thérèse Emmanuel answered in the name of all. Though her distress betrayed itself in the tone of her voice, her words were unequivocal and firm. To withdraw from the authority of the Ordinary was equivalent to destroying the work which had as yet scarcely begun. To go and settle in the country was to make the creation of a school—the main object of the Congregation—an impossibility. Finally, not one of the Sisters would consent to separate themselves from Mother Marie Eugénie.

M. Combalot was utterly taken aback by this answer. He asked for his books and his letters, and left the house, saying that he would never look at his former daughters again.

Such was the dramatic exit of this remarkable—for so he was from many points of view—and eccentric priest. It is consoling to be able to record that before twenty-four hours had elapsed his better sense and loyalty to the Church and to God, whose servant he was, prevailed, and on the evening before leaving he wrote the following letter to the Archbishop :

" My Lord, I am starting for Rome, and before leaving Paris I come to beg of you to nominate a superior to the little Congregation of which I have prepared the beginnings, and to place in your hands, and in the hands of anyone to whom you will confide them, all liberty to continue and consolidate this work which is still in its infancy. I resign the authority I possess over it, in my capacity of Father and Founder,

into your hands. I have been fortunate in forming this nucleus ; the idea which gave rise to it appears to me a useful and opportune one, but my personal co-operation would henceforth be the source of obstacles which would be a hindrance to its development. I have enemies whose ill-will would fall upon my daughters. Placed under your immediate authority, they will have no disturbances to fear ; and I, whilst recognizing the qualifications and virtues which are wanting in me to complete the work, shall bless God for its development. I thank you from my heart for the paternal interest which you have shown up to this time in seconding my efforts ; and I ask you on my knees to give to this undertaking the efficacious assistance which it requires for its establishment.—I remain, etc., etc."

Mother Marie Eugénie lost no time in visiting Mgr Affre in order to acquaint him with the position in which the community was now placed. Having already received the Abbé's letter, it occasioned him no surprise. His comment, after hearing from the superior that M. Combalot had taken formal leave of them, was : " A man with a noble heart, but a hot head." He then added : " It was very characteristic of the man, the way he cut the Gordian knot."

In the conversation which followed, Mother Marie Eugénie informed the Archbishop that the nuns recited the Divine Office. " You will not be able to keep to it," he said. " I have been obliged to deprive nuns of it who have it in their Rule, you had much better take the Office of our Lady, which is said by all the teaching Orders, or you will find your active work impeded by such a heavy charge on your time."

"My Lord," answered Mother Marie Eugénie, "our special vocation is to join action with prayer. We do not look so much to the extent of the good we hope to accomplish as to its perfection. As far as I am concerned, I am prepared to follow your wishes, even to

give up the Divine Office if you desire it, only I must warn your Grace that knowing the Sisters as I do, if I bring them back this decision, they will all give up the work and I shall be left solitary."

Mgr Affre then suggested that they should adopt the breviary in use by the clergy of Paris, which is shorter: "May I offer this objection to your Grace," was her answer, "that if we are favoured by Providence, we may be able to establish ourselves in other towns, and every diocese in France possesses its own special Office; if we had a house in Lyons, we should have, for instance, to use the Lyonese breviary."—"True; well, keep your Roman breviary, but before long you will ask me to relieve you of it."

Later on, Sister Thérèse Emmanuel used to say to the novices, when repeating the Archbishop's words, "We have the Divine Office; we have gained our cause; we must now hold on to it as the most precious of our possessions, and we must inspire those who come after us with such a love of the prayer of the Church that we may never be deprived of it."

Before taking leave of the Archbishop, Mother Marie Eugénie received from him a promise that he would take the community under his protection; he gave them M. Gros as superior, M. le Saint, chaplain to the Carmelites as their confessor, and M. Maupier for their chaplain. A letter which Mother Marie Eugénie wrote to her former superior soon after this interview shows her feelings with regard to the breach in their relations:

"I come, my very dear Father—for it would be impossible for me to give you any name but this—to give you an account of my visit to the Archbishop. I saw his Grace; he was very kind in what he said, both about us and about you. It was not necessary for me to enter into details; I told him simply that your decision came from a misunderstanding between us. He has given us M. Gros as Superior. For my

part, the only reason I shall allege for this nomination is the custom of choosing a priest always resident in the diocese for such a post. To conclude, I am, and always shall be your daughter; we have all this filial sentiment towards you, and we are happy when we can express the gratitude and respect we feel for you. I was deeply distressed by the harshness you showed in refusing to give me a few moments before your departure; but I was much touched by your letter to the Archbishop, and I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart. I trust you will remember us at the feet of the Apostles, and that our Lord, before whom I pour forth all the feelings of my heart for you, will inspire you with the charitable thought of not leaving us long without hearing from you. You know me well enough to be aware that I am only too honest; believe me then, my very dear Father, if I renew the assurance of a filial attachment which nothing will ever equal."

To Mother Marie Eugénie the severance was one that she felt deeply, and it was done in a way that was most calculated to wound her heart. She wrote of it in the following words: "I should not have thought I was capable of feeling what I do on the subject. I shed tears like a child, and instead of the detachment which I thought I possessed, I finish by thinking that I was more attached to him than he was to the work."

In summing up the impression left on us by this episode in Mother Marie Eugénie's life, it is impossible not to come to the conclusion that the work of laying the foundations of the Congregation of the Assumption owed everything, under Providence, to her humility, patience and forbearance. To M. Combalot belongs the merit of the initial conception of founding an Order which would have for its primary object the introduction of the Christian idea into the education of the higher classes, under the protection of the Blessed

Mother of God, and in celebration of her glorious Assumption into heaven. This worthy and zealous priest had all the qualities required for a pioneer, and this was essentially his mission. He had enthusiasm; without which, as it has often been said, nothing great has ever been founded; he was pious, clear-sighted and eloquent, and had many merits of heart and head. But a fatal want of balance in his character nullified his good qualities, and finally led to a complete breach between him and the Congregation he had nursed into existence. To Mother Marie Eugénie this crucial defect must have been doubly trying, as she rightly conceived the religious life as being built up on the virtues of humility, self-abnegation and obedience. M. Combalot's erratic character rendered the exercise of these virtues, especially the two last, one of great difficulty. How was it possible to give implicit obedience to one who never held the same opinion for two days together? Or to follow a guidance which was more like that of a will o' the wisp than that of a steady beacon by means of whose light she and her companions could steer their footsteps. The trials which pressed heavily on the Foundress in the early days of the establishment of the Assumption Order were no unusual ones. No work for God has ever been carried out unless it has been stamped with the mark of the Cross. Never till we reach the eternal shores shall we realize the pangs, the trials endured, the works of penance dug into the foundations of the religious Orders by the Saints to whom God has given the glorious mission of founding them. The hand of God may be seen in all Mother Marie Eugénie's trials; for would she have leant so utterly on our Lord's guidance, and seen His will so clearly as she did in all the subsequent events, if she had not felt, not once, but many times, that all human aid was failing her, so that she was obliged, by the very force of circumstances, to trust to Him alone? Thus what at the outset

appeared to be a trial, threatening the very existence of the infant Congregation, turned out to be the very means of establishing it on the surest, because the most supernatural foundation : that of the Divine will.

CHAPTER VIII

"Mon Epoux en mourant m'a laissé ses lumières :"
Je vois, je sais, je crois ! CORNEILLE.

THE little community of the Rue Vaugirard, relieved from immediate fears for their future, settled down to their usual peaceful life of prayer and study. M. Gerbet gave them conferences upon the subjects of philosophy and Christian art, and Mother Marie Eugénie and Léon Boré upon the literature of foreign countries. M. Maupied gave them lessons on geology and comparative anatomy.

So far, though they practised the Rule, they were bound by no vows ; but the three first Religious of the Assumption, Mother Marie Eugénie, Sister Thérèse Emmanuel and Sister Marie Augustine, having passed through their novitiate—their time of trial—were ready when the Feast of the Assumption arrived, to make this solemn consecration of themselves to God. These vows, however, were temporary ones, as the Rule they had adopted, not having received the Church's sanction, they could take no others. The 15th of August 1841 was fixed upon for the Profession. M. Gros presided at the ceremony and received their vows. The habit of the professed nuns was from that time distinguished from the habit of the novices by their white woollen veil which marks their consecration to their Divine Spouse and His Virgin Mother, and the white cross on the breast, signifying that their lives were to be partly active and partly contemplative, finally by the gold ring, symbolic of espousals founded on divine charity. A motto was engraved on each ring. Mother Marie Eugénie's bore the words of

St Peter, "*Domine, Tu scis quia amo Te.*" Sister Thérèse Emmanuel's the song of the seraphim, "*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth,*" Sister Marie Augustine's, the words "*Deus meus et omnia.*"

Mother Marie Eugénie registered her impressions on this memorable day, as she was accustomed to do, in a little book intended for her eye only.

The following passages are from it :

"During Mass I tried to concentrate my thoughts upon Jesus born in poverty in the stable in Bethlehem ; on Jesus at Nazareth, a poor artisan, subject to Joseph ; on Jesus preaching in Judea ; on Jesus on the cross in the days when the world was ignorant of the virtue of the Cross. He is there the Spouse I ask for and who is given to me. And it appeared to me that I heard Jesus saying to me in the depths of my heart, 'Do you know what my life is like ? Do you know that my poverty is hard, that it is wanting in everything, that it has no comforts, nothing that is sweet or pleasant at any moment or in any respect ? . . . Do you know that in the labourer's house men work harder than they are able, that they suffer, that they are wanting in the necessities of life, that they have to take from their night's rest if the day is not long enough, that they have no leisure for themselves ? Do you know that poverty is a yoke which obliges people to submit to all the world, and which deprives them of assistance, even of such as is spiritual ? Do you know that I am a jealous Spouse ? To be mine you should take no pleasure except in me ; none of your senses should be gratified in anything. I wish your eyes to be lowered, your ears closed, your mouth dumb, unless some exterior requirement oblige you to give attention to a created object. Do you know that I gave my obedience to all men ? To those who understood me, and to those who understood me not ? At all hours, always and in all things. Do you submit yourself with me to my Father, to Mary and Joseph, then to whoever

Mère Marie Eugénie de Jésus.

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wishes to give you orders on any plea of legitimate priestly authority? . . . Do you see my abandonment, my sacrifice, my sufferings? Do you wish all this? Your vow will bind thee to do all this. . . .'

"'Lord Jesus, such as I am, poor and devoid of all virtue, vile and unworthy in all my actions, I yet dare to implore Thy mercy to lead me in the ways of true, pure and sincere perfection of religious souls.'

"Forget, my soul, all the ties of earth and all worldly ideas: work under God's eye alone, doing all purely for Him, and seeking Him at all times. Desire not friends, nor success, nor joys: then have no fear. Love, and give yourself up to Him. Your God will be everything to you; He will have His eyes ever on you, for then you will possess nothing more on earth, and you have yourself asked Him to give you His cross."

Prayer was the life of Mother Marie Eugénie's soul, as it is of all those who give themselves without reserve to the service of God in the religious life. Though we are not told that she scaled the heights of supernatural contemplation, yet we learn from sources, such as her correspondence with her director, and from his knowledge of her interior life, that her union with God was close and intimate. She had a special attraction to the Divine Office. For her it signified the source and nourishment of her prayer. "I have tried," she wrote in December 1841, "to say my Office as if it was but an echo of the voice of Jesus Christ, repeating His sentiments to His Father and complete setting aside of my own, so that they should be united and lost in those of Jesus Christ in such a manner that there should remain nothing but His thoughts in mine. . . . The effect of this in me was that uniting my love with that of Jesus Christ, and desiring to possess in the measure of which I was capable the same loving dispositions He had for His Father, I understood that they should consist in a silent abandonment of self in all things and towards all things."

"To will what God wills, as He wills, when He wills, by whom He wills, and this incessantly and in the smallest things; to bow before the smallest indication of His will, to be ready to be abased, to be raised up, to be joyful or afflicted, in the light or in darkness, joyfully with the same satisfaction born of love; to approve of all, to be content with everything, not to utter one word, even interiorly, which is not of consent, *quia sic placitum est ante Te:* that is what I saw in the two words which remained firmly fixed in my soul 'Abandonment and silence.' This manner of receiving God's gifts "by diverting as much as possible my attention from them, allowing them like a grain of incense to be consumed before God to His glory; confiding in Him the care of making me draw from them the fruits that He wishes to come of them is one that dates from my retreat on the Feast of the Assumption last year, and of the act of abandonment that I then made. This method appears to me more pure, worthier of God's free disposal of His graces and His sovereign power over all His gifts; at the same time it takes all my cares from me and fills me with liberty and joy.'"

The winter which followed the events described in the last chapter, though it brought no increase of numbers to the Assumption, was one of spiritual growth for every member of it. They studied and prayed and waited for the designs of Providence to manifest themselves. Several postulants had presented themselves, but they were disheartened by the poverty and the austere life led by the Sisters, and they failed to persevere. Public opinion, too, was against them. M. Gros, their Superior, was asked what was the intention of these young girls? Why, if they wished to be nuns did they not join a tried Order—a Congregation already in existence? He also had his doubts on the subject, and he put them at last before Mother Marie Eugénie, asking her: "as she was fond of the Order of the Visitation, why she did not join it?

Would it not be wiser to devote her life to a work already blessed by God instead of undertaking one whose object was not very well defined, and which had already encountered many obstacles. As for her companions, each one might make a choice of the Order which suited her best."

Mother Marie Eugénie asked M. Gros' permission to take a little time to reflect before giving him an answer. She then consulted with her daughters and prayed long before the Blessed Sacrament. The following letter was the outcome of her mature deliberations; and as, besides describing her own feelings it shows a thorough grasp of the subject such as only a master-mind could conceive, we give it without curtailing any part of it.

"My much honoured and very dear Father.—In expressing the wish to me, as you lately did, to know the difference I find between this work and that of the Visitation, in asking me to reflect upon it before God, so as to give you my reasons for my conviction that I am not called to be a Visitandine, you have imposed a duty on me which I ask your permission to perform in writing, as I fear I should not be able to explain myself with sufficient clearness in speaking.

"The thought which was most prominent in the formation of this work was one dictated by zeal, and it was that which determined my vocation. I belonged to a family which, unfortunately, was Christian but in name, and I was brought up amongst people who were even less so. I lost my mother at the age of fifteen, and having had from the course of events and from my position more knowledge of the world and relations with it than is usually the case at that age, I was able to understand the miserable state of the class of society to which I belonged. I must own to you that even at the present moment I know nothing sadder than the impression it left on me. It appears to me that every soul that has any love of the Church, and who is acquainted with the utter absence of religion in three-

quarters of the rich and influential families in Paris, must feel themselves urged to try and restore Jesus Christ to His place in them.

"But what can be done to effect this? The men never enter a church. The women go there at two in the afternoon, for the sake of the crowd and the smart clothes, but with habits and prejudices which are invincible obstacles to any good which they might derive; the sons go to College; all that is left are the daughters, who, up to this time, have been sent to fashionable boarding-schools to be educated, or are brought up by governesses who are often of light morals and devoid of Christian principles. I have hardly known an instance in which the result has not been deplorable, even in the opinion of the unbelieving parents themselves. It is this last circumstance which affords some ground for hope. Unfortunately in the class of which I am speaking, that is, in the families of bankers, lawyers, barristers, etc., of what may be called the higher middle-class, inveterate prejudice stands in the way of convent education. They quite realise that the means they have employed up to the present time have not implanted those virtues in their daughters which even the world looks for in them; but they insist on a liberal education in the widest sense of the word, and the manners which befit their class, and the old-established religious institutes which are a source of confidence to the pious are for them a stumbling-block. Grilles would be enough to make them take fright, and I should say the same of many other little practices and observances which would keep them aloof from convents such as those of the Visitation. As to those convents specially given up to education, you must allow me to say—since in so serious a matter truth is the only thing to be considered—their doors are closed to the class of which I am speaking on account of three prejudices against them: for their political bias, want of proper teaching, and of the manners of good society.

" I was aware of all these things when M. Combalot first spoke to me about his work ; it struck me accordingly as being destined to bring about a great good, and one which I earnestly desired. He told me with the authority of a priest speaking in confession that I ought to take part in it and devote myself to it. I must own to you, Father, that it cost me much to do so ; but if it was God who called me to undertake it, what account could I give to Him one day of those souls whom a cowardly egotism alone prevented me from serving ? I felt the weight of the great graces which had brought me the knowledge of God, and of that gift of faith of which alone of all my people I had been the recipient. It was possible that it was in the designs of God that I should have had those experiences and should see in the mercy which saved me from them, and in the accomplishments which education had given me, a still greater reason why I should consecrate them to Him inasmuch as till then they had only fed my vanity.

" Besides this, notwithstanding all my repugnance I felt a strong attraction to take up the work from a zeal for souls, and I knew well that once I had made up my mind, nothing would cost me too much to imitate Jesus Christ in His mission of Saviour to these poor souls, whom ignorance, much more than ill-will, keeps at a distance from Him. These, Father, were the thoughts that determined me to give myself to God. They are those which to a greater or lesser extent have influenced my Sisters ; they are at least a strong motive of encouragement to them.

" The vocation of the Visitandines rests on quite a different basis, and I require no proof of this other than the frame of mind which made me wish to become one. This happened to me two years later, when, to put it in plain language, I no longer doubted my vocation, but the capability of the Founder. At the outset I put my trust in the sincerity of his zeal.

Knowing life as yet only from its worldly side, I then thought that what had no relation to it savoured of superhuman perfection. It required experience for me to learn that the sincerest zeal does not always insure perseverance, steadfastness and patience, without which nothing can succeed. But at the end of two years, although so far the work had not even been begun, I was gaining experience, and I had found in his direction of my own spiritual life a variability that augured more trials than successes.

" I must own to you that I was a prey to discouragement ; in addition to this the state of physical weakness in which I was at that time caused me to look back, not towards the world (for I had made up my mind to give myself, not to lend myself, to our Lord) but to that sweet tranquil life of the Visitation in which I then found myself, and I had a great longing to remain there, in order no longer to occupy myself with any thought but that of my salvation. The spirit of the Visitation seemed to me so essentially one of contemplation that in entering it I should have chosen a house where there was no school, so as to become a member of a community which carried out St Francis de Sales' institute precisely as he saw it, in order not to find myself occupied in a work which was opposed to all the rules and traditions of the Order.

" It was my confessor, the chaplain of the house I was in, who, after having examined the dispositions of my soul, and God's leadings in my regard, told me to go on persevering and not to think of the contemplative life till I had done all that I could to devote myself to a work such as the one to which I had this attraction. Moreover, every confessor I have had has seen, as he did, a positive mark of vocation in the courage God has always given me for this work, in spite of the reasons and temptations to discouragement and my natural cowardice.

" At the present moment, however, I am far from

being discouraged. God has restored me to health; He has given me strength to support the greater number of the trials which I had shrunk from beforehand; He has fortified me in my vocation and in the attraction I had by the performance of the duties which have come of it, and the practices to which it has given rise. He has given me Sisters in religion, suitable from every point of view for carrying out the work of zeal which I have explained to you. They are virtuous religious, and there are few communities whom I have come across to which I would rather belong—judging only from the point of view of their single-mindedness and love of God. We have every day the consolation of seeing those whose children we should like to bring up showing confidence in our system of education. Everything—even the jokes of which we are the object—serve our purpose. We are said to be learned; nothing could be more likely than this epithet to bring us the children we want. Time will be required to bring this about; but we are young, and prepared to wait. I am not surprised to find that our ways and practices please people instead of shocking them; and I have often seen parents come here, who had not previously approached me since I become a nun, and who say that what we are is quite different from what they imagine people are in convents elsewhere. As a matter of fact, they are mistaken, and I appeal, Father, to you, to recognize that we have not repudiated any of the duties nor even the usages of religious life, and that our Rule, instead of diminishing the number of so-called monastic observances, has multiplied them. More than one objection even has been made by persons who, having become acquainted with our Rule, and approving of our object, would have wished us to look for greater freedom of action by curtailing some of our religious observances. But this way of proceeding, though at first it seems more natural and even more advantageous—inasmuch as it would give

more time to the teaching-Sisters appears to me to be so dangerous in the long run to the spirit of the Congregation, that I should not hesitate to prefer to it even the fatigue and subjection of daily practices of piety, the effect of which will be to bring us back forcibly, so to speak, to the spirit of our state of life. Accordingly we should all of us prefer to go a little sooner to heaven, or to limit the number of our pupils, according to the number of the nuns, rather than to lose the Office, Chapter, and humble actions that our Rule prescribes. If others have been able to dispense with these aids, we are conscious that our weakness makes them necessary to us ; and above all in works dictated by zeal for souls one should, in my opinion, think more of these than of the amount we are capable of achieving.

" As regards our spirit and community life, we have, as you are aware, drawn largely from St Francis de Sales. Some differences there are, but such differences are in conformity with what is practised in other Orders, which a long experience has already sanctioned. They should serve either to conciliate in our regard the opinion of those whose children we hope to gain for our Lord, or to give us the means of rendering ourselves useful to them.

" These are the differences : (1) We are not cloistered, but in doing away with grilles we do away with many obstacles to education. Who is not conscious of the world's prejudice against grilles ? Much might be added, too, on the necessity of letting children know the meaning of poverty [1] who are ignorant of its very name ; on the counterpoise which works of charity give to study, and of the benefit of relations between the poor and the rich ; of the advantage to the nuns in the way of preserving them from an impressionability from which nuns in an enclosed Order

[1] It was M. Combalot's wish the children should he encouraged to visit the poor in their own houses. This was renounced later and other charitable works substituted for it.

with difficulty escape, and of which in the case of those who teach there would be a greater risk, owing to the relations in which they stand towards the children. So far I have never laid these reasons before the Archbishop nor before you, Father; yet you of yourself have realised that experiences might justify Rules that we share with the nuns of the Congregation of St Maur, St Thomas, and the Saviour.

"(2) We say the Divine Office; it was the special attraction of all the Sisters, and in prayer God's attraction must count for something. Added to this, the nuns occupied with education have more need to pray than others; they bring back distractions from the class-room, which the words—understood by them—are more fitted to combat than mental prayer, unfortunately, would be. The Divine Office makes us children of the Church in the sense that we follow her feasts and exterior ceremonies. Thus children brought up with us will acquire a greater love of, and become more accustomed to the public prayers of their parish church than if we only made use of special devotions. The Church's liturgy and all the exterior ritual of the Divine Office will attract them and draw them to God.

"(3) Our beds, plates and dishes, etc., are the same as those of the Carmelites, but that is not a great mortification: it is unknown to the world, and health does not suffer from it, and, brought into intercourse as we shall be with children who are accustomed to ways of luxury and self-indulgence, we could not practise too much poverty, not only in order to impress upon them a certain degree of contempt for the good things of life, as to preserve ourselves from worldly ideas on those subjects.

"(4) Lastly, there is the motive of zeal which is emphasised in our Constitutions; there are regulations with regard to studies—since being obliged to give our minds to them, we should approach them in a

religious and serious spirit, and seek nothing in them but the means of spreading the knowledge of Jesus Christ. A question might arise as to the utility of going deeply into these studies had we no other object except that of attracting Christian parents who would be sufficiently reasonable to be satisfied with what is really of use to women, but if it is only a case of giving ourselves a little trouble in yielding to the mania for scientific knowledge of people living in the world, which is so common in these days in order to gain their daughters' salvation, should we not be doing wrong in refusing to take it ? For this is a matter of certainty, that unless we can prove that we are capable of teaching all that is taught in their schools, they will not give us their daughters in order that they may be taught the Faith. But, it may be said, you have not reduced all this to practice. All we ask is to be allowed to make a trial ; besides this, education having always been our object, we have always differed from a contemplative Order as much as the novitiate of an active Order differs in its spirit from it, though the latter may make use of the same practices. And, if you call to mind that I have possibly shown an attraction to the great austere Orders, permit me, again, to reply to this by saying that to my mind nothing approaches nearer to active work for the salvation of souls than works of penance. They should have the same end in view.

" I might almost reproach myself, my dear Father, for having dared to open my mind to you at such length and so candidly, if I did not believe that in doing so I was obeying your wishes. For the rest, believe me that we are convinced that we are wanting in that holiness which is required for the works of God ; and therefore, speaking for myself, I should not be astonished at any kind of want of success. Notwithstanding this, I can honestly affirm that our own satisfaction has never been the end we have sought to attain, but what has fortified our courage has been

to receive the testimony from the Archbishop's own mouth, that our Rule is a good and edifying one, and later to have received the holy habit—which we wear joyfully and lovingly—from his hands. I am not aware of anything we have done in the observance of this Rule to forfeit the kindly interest which his Grace has been good enough to grant to us; but if we are ever found to be unworthy of it, and that this apostolic work to which we have wished to devote ourselves should not be carried out by us, forgive me if I go so far as to say that it is so necessary that sooner or later it will be undertaken by more worthy hands; and as for me, I feel I have no other vocation but that of belonging to it, however great may be the sufferings and difficulties entailed by it.

"I am taking a daughter's liberty—deign to pardon it; as well as the wearisome length of this letter, and be pleased, Father, to receive the assurance of the respectful regard with which I remain your humble and obedient servant in Jesus and Mary, Sister Marie Eugénie de Jésus."

In this admirable letter we have a complete justification for the existence of the Congregation of the Assumption. The future was such as to justify the Foundress' hopes and prove the correctness of her anticipations. The answer she received from M. Gros was in all respects satisfactory, and proved the wisdom of the Archbishop's choice in appointing him superior:

"All your views are Christian, estimable, and worthy of your religious profession. I can but thank God for the graces He has given you and for those He prepares for you in the future. . . . Do not give a thought to anything I have said to you, unless it be to strengthen you in your holy vocation by the constant practice of humility and self-abnegation, and by entirely stripping yourself of human and selfish views. This is to aim very high, but the just man never says 'it is enough,' in the ways of perfection. As regards

this, I am but speaking to you in your own language, and I feel sure that on these points you will not find me too strict. To resume what I have said: have no anxiety about your vocation, about your future. Have confidence in the Archbishop, who takes a sincere interest in you; make progress in the ways of perfection."

As Mother Marie Eugénie's biographer very truly says, the dominant thought of the holy foundress was of an apostolate established on the royal foundation—that of all good works, the Hill of Calvary.

"The basis of Christianity is the sacrifice of Him who 'when joy was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame,' or, as St Gertrude said, gave up the bliss of heaven to go in search of suffering. The Christian religion was not intended to furnish each one of us with the means of attaining eternal beatitude alone. Every soul has been given a mission similar to that of Jesus Christ, and has to work at causing the Father's kingdom to come in other souls. This mission has to be accomplished by the same means that Jesus Christ took, with no anxiety except to accomplish God's work, abandoning its success to His Providence in time and in eternity. Accordingly, to make Jesus Christ known—the Deliverer and King; to preach that all is His; that present as He is in our souls by the life of grace He desires to work at establishing in them the kingdom of God; that we should all of us enter into His plan, either to suffer or to pray or to work; that to refuse to do so, whatever the pretext may be, is to refuse 'the best part' and to take the part of egotism—such is the beginning and end of Christian teaching. When Christianity first penetrated into the pagan world, it took the form of expiation. It was necessary to learn first of all to suffer, in the days when the faith was the first step towards martyrdom. But the type of saints changes from century to century. This is the reason why the Church is always requiring

new religious Orders. The thought which is necessary in modern times in order to sustain the Christian soul and to be the great spring of action, is the thought of extending the reign of Christ, at working at the realisation of the ideal held up by our Lord to His disciples, when He said 'there shall be one fold and one shepherd,' and 'the Son of Man when He shall be raised up, shall draw all men to Himself.' [1]

"These were the ideas which supported Mother Marie Eugénie, and maintained her courage in the trying time which intervened before she was given an opportunity of proving the justice of her views and putting them into practice. She had another trial also, and it was no light one; she was without a director. M. Combalot had failed her, and it was some time before she found a successor to him. It is not surprising to find that she first turned her thoughts to Lacordaire. Since the interview she had with him, which was recorded in an earlier chapter, in which he had explained to her the sense in which he understood a vocation to the religious life, she had always felt that she was (as she expressed it) 'his spiritual daughter before God.' She dated from that day the determination, one in which she never faltered, of working for the salvation of souls. In a tentative letter which she wrote to him, she asked him to help her by tracing out a road for her: she would not (she said) ask him to accompany her every step of the way. But the great Dominican was too much absorbed in his conferences and the affairs of his Order to undertake her direction; besides, his method was to leave each one to his or her own initiative. Accordingly he promised simply to answer the questions she wished to put before him. The director whom later on she was to look upon as a God-given one had not up to this time come into her life. Though she had corresponded with M. d'Alzon (it is of him we speak), their personal

[1] *Une Fondatrice*, p. 150.

acquaintance was slight, and it was not till two years later, in the summer of 1843, that his counsels and influence with the holy Foundress became what they were later, and continued to be till his death. The words spoken of him by the author of Mother Marie Eugénie's life were justified by the event: 'Of all the influences blessed by God which assisted in the development of the spirit of the Assumption, none was more prominent than that of the Very Reverend Father d'Alzon.'"

CHAPTER IX

"La perfection de la charité, c'est la perfection de la vie, car la vie de notre âme c'est la charité."

St Francis de Sales.

The first child sent to the Assumption to be educated was Irish, and was called Emma Henrietta Ryan. She was a niece of a friend of Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, and she was warmly welcomed by her. This event—for it was no doubt looked upon in that light by the little community—took place in October, and was followed in December by the arrival of another child, Emma Cronier, and in January 1842 by a third of the name of Naomi Colet. These three children were respectively, twelve, ten and eight years of age. The prospect for the future was now sufficiently bright to encourage the superior to look about for larger and more commodious premises. She found these in the Rue des Postes, in what is still known as the Quartier Latin. The house, which went by the name of l'Impasse des Vignes, consisted of two medium-sized houses and a large garden. It had been owned by a community of Augustinian Nuns. Mother Marie Eugénie moved into it in the spring of 1842. Sister Marie Thérèse has left a record of her first impressions of the place when she visited it with the superior earlier in the year.

"I remember the weather was very cold and the ground was covered with snow. Nothing more dismal could be imagined than the appearance of the two houses; but the garden was a large one and there were some fine trees in it. The houses also were of a good size, and what decided us was that the rent was low. . . . Though the two houses were close together, it

was necessary to make a passage to connect them. This passage was by no means elegant; for want of better materials, it was made of old planks, the walls were covered with tarred cloth and the ceiling of tarred paper. The children were lodged in the least ugly of the two houses, and we took the more miserable one. There was a large chapel which was anything but beautiful, but was convenient, as it had been built for that purpose. The altar which we had had in the Rue de Vaugirard was found to be not large enough, so we bought one from the Benedictine Nuns of Port Royal. This altar was very plain, but it sufficed for the chapel. We used it at Chaillot, and it is now in the chapel of the Immaculate Conception. Our Mother values it very much, as it was in front of this altar that we pronounced our solemn vows. Our parlours were not more elegant than the rest. We manufactured one in a kind of granary, a real garret, the walls of which were crumbling to pieces. It had no ceiling and the roof was so dilapidated that one could have seen the sky through it. We had another tiny one next door to the chapel; it was also very ugly but more convenient."

A letter from Mother Marie Eugénie dated 18th July 1842, shows that far from complaining of these discomforts and the extra labour they entailed on the community, she welcomed them, and saw only the good of which they were productive. "One of the things upon which I rely most to encourage in our Sisters a love of the labouring-classes," she wrote, "is the habit of practical poverty. I have strong desire to preserve the readiness for every kind of active work which exists, I am glad to say, at present amongst our choir Sisters—even of those who are the most distinguished for literary ability. This has given us a practical feeling of brotherhood with the poor: it is that alone which makes us understand their labours, their sufferings and even the legitimate cause of many of the defects with which they are reproached. It also

causes us to be much loved by them, and I can say, speaking on this subject, that I am more and more astonished at the goodness of the lower classes."

The community had only been established a few weeks in their new quarters, when, on the 25th of May 1842, Sister Marie Thérèse of the Incarnation, and Sister Marie Josèphe of the Nativity pronounced their first vows in the little convent chapel. The priest who assisted at this ceremony was M. Deguerry, who later on was to receive the martyr's palm at the hands of the ruffians of the Commune. Sister Marie Thérèse chose as the motto of her ring, "*O Crux, ave, spes unica*," while Sister Marie Josèphe selected "*Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi.*"

It was an occasion for all the friends of the infant Congregation to show their interest in it. Accordingly we are told that Mme Chateaubriand, the wife of the poet and author, was present; also the great leader of Catholic opinion and politics, Comte de Montalembert —the latter a relative of Sister Marie Thérèse, a member of the community. A Catholic paper (the *Gazette de France*), commenting on M. Deguerry's sermon, said that he had succeeded in bringing out in moving terms the joy unknown to the world of a life of self-sacrifice dedicated to God; for it was from Him alone that they who had pronounced their vows awaited recompense. "His words were all the more touching, as they were pronounced on the occasion of the inauguration of a work which owed its origin to the devotedness of women belonging to the upper-classes of society, who had left the world in order to work for its good by seeking to introduce into the education of young girls of the same station of life the saving graces of Christianity, without which learning and talents would be but occasions of temptation and danger. To make them true mothers of families; to give to women solid and well-grounded knowledge, and simple, active habits, without which they would be unable to exercise

the influence which Christianity should give them—such are the objects of this Congregation upon which so many hopes have been founded."

On the 8th of November of the same year Sister Marie Gonzague pronounced her first vows.

The community were now seven in number. Sister Thérèse Emmanuel was given the charge of Assistant and Mistress of Novices, Sister Marie Augustine that of head-mistress of the school, Sister Marie Thérèse became infirmarian and sacristan, Sister Marie Gonzague assisted the head-mistress in the management of the children. All the nuns took part in one way or another in the school. The superior gave lessons in German, and Sister Thérèse Emmanuel in English and geography.

The school increased gradually during the course of the summer and autumn, so that when the children reassembled at the end of September they numbered fourteen. The eldest of these, Joséphine Macnamara, was fifteen years of age when she arrived. She was a cousin of Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, and later on she joined the community. Her name in religion was Sister Marie Marguerite, and she became afterwards superior of the London house and Assistant-General to the Congregation. Many years later Sister Marie Marguerite recorded on paper her recollections of her school days in the Impasse des Vignes.

After recalling the impression of the charm and holiness of every member of the community, she says how they gained the hearts of the children by the gifts of nature and grace which they saw in them. "The superiority of their minds, the distinction of their manners, the elevation of their thoughts, served to make us proud of having them as our mistresses. And then how well we realised that our Lord held the first place in their lives; that it was for Him they were working, and in all they taught their great object was to bring us to the knowledge of Him. Their

Mère Marie Marguerite
Second Assistant General.

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fervour in prayer; their love for the Divine Office; their attachment to the newly founded Congregation; their tender veneration for her whom they called 'Our Mother': all these things delighted us and filled us with admiration for the religious life. Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, who was not so often with us, seemed to us like a celestial apparition. She gave us lessons in English and geography. At first there were only two of us in this class. She insisted on our working, but she never scolded; she was so kind that we felt we never could displease her. We used to love to watch her, especially in the chapel. Her very look made one pray, and we always believed that there were sweet mysteries in her prayer hidden from us. One night, when in consequence of repairs which were being made in the dormitory one of us was sleeping next door to her, she heard Sister Thérèse Emmanuel speaking to our Lord, 'in such ardent and tender words that' said the young girl, 'I feel sure our Lord had appeared to her.'"

The author of the *Origines de l'Assumption* says very truly of this holy religious: "It was a great grace for us to possess this prayerful soul at the commencement of our foundation—one who was inundated with divine favours, and who gave herself up utterly to God's designs upon her. She it was who sustained the Foundress in all her interior and exterior trials by her confidence that God was with her, and that the work was to be accomplished through her means. No one grasped better than Sister Thérèse Emmanuel the idea of the Assumption from the point of view of zeal for souls, and that of communicating the truths of the Catholic religion by education. If her office of Mistress of Novices brought her less closely in contact with the children, nevertheless it was she who formed mothers for them in developing the spirit of zeal and devotion in her novices.

"This spirit was especially characteristic of Sister

Marie Augustine, and we must recognise the important place which she occupied in the foundation of the first Assumptionist school. She put a great spirit of life into it: establishing the love of Christian truth and of the natural qualities of frankness, loyalty and honour, supernaturalised by faith, as the basis of education, for these form the ground-work of a fine character—in other words of the Christian character. Everything with her converged towards this end: the formation of Christian characters, that is of Christian minds, wills and habits of life.

"This was the leading idea of M. Combalot; it was that of our Mother, and of Father d'Alzon, who was providentially given to us by God to assist us in carrying out our work without faltering in it or deviation from it.

"Full of enthusiasm for this work, of which she saw all the beauty, Sister Marie Augustine began from the time the school started to draw up syllabuses (or primers) on such subjects as History, Literature, etc., all of which we still possess and preserve religiously. These courses of studies were of course above the comprehension of the little pupils of the Impasse des Vignes; but it was necessary to prepare for the future, and the school-books of that time were so devoid of elevated ideas, and so full of prejudices, that a teacher required to make out her own course of studies in order to give them a Catholic direction."

The following is one of the eight articles contained in this programme of studies. We give it in order to show how fundamental were Sister Marie Augustine's views upon the subject of the teaching which should be given to children.

"Truth in all its aspects—theological, moral, historical, legislative, literary, poetic, artistic and scientific—should be specially sought for in the Old and New Testaments, the Fathers of the Church, in the History and Councils of the Church and in the

Lives of the Saints. Children should be continually impressed with this fundamental idea that absolute truth, which is universal, which has come down to us through the centuries without alteration, and which is destined to be developed and spread through all ages by a progressive increase, is to be found in the patriarchical and Mosaic Law and in Roman Catholicism."

Some people may be tempted to say that the above scheme or syllabus is a little too comprehensive; in short, that in trying to prove everything Sister Marie Augustine might end by proving nothing. But we have to remember for whom she intended it, and the times in which she lived. They were times when a large majority of her countrymen had grown up without any belief in revealed truth, and the women though they still clung to the forms of religious belief, knew little about the grounds on which it was founded. To bring up the children, therefore, of families who, as Marie Eugénie said of her own, were Christian only in name, to a knowledge of the great elementary truths as proclaimed in the Bible, and to establish this last on what St Paul calls "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," was the primary duty of the Christian teacher. Discrimination might come later. What had to be first impressed on the youthful intelligence were the facts of religion and the authority for them.

The thought of what could be done to equip the children confided to them to be ready to meet the trials and possibly, strong opposition, which awaited them on their return to their homes, was the one which preoccupied the mind of the superior as well as the Mistresses of the school. We find accordingly that the latter pressed Mother Marie Eugénie to put some of her views on paper for their guidance. She did so, but (as she says) with some misgiving, and only for their private perusal. The following is a short summing up of these notes:

After premising that the subject was a very difficult one, and that she had neither the knowledge nor the experience necessary for it, she says :

" My method would be to keep as near as possible to Jesus Christ in order to judge everything by His light. Follow this method, my dear daughters, and believe me, it will supply all that is wanting to us all in wisdom. Faith gives even more wisdom and intelligence than old age : ' *Super senes intellexi quia mandata tua quaesivi* ' (Ps. 118). St Augustine (to whom we may give the name of our blessed Father, since we follow his Rule), said that there are in this world two cities formed by two loves : the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God ; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. Egotism and self-sacrifice : these are the principles from whence spring all evil and all good in matters here below. What is it in truth that our Lord came to do in the world except to accomplish for His Father and for us a work of such self-devotion that no personal interest can account for it. And did He not make of the Cross which He carried—which is the ultimate expression of the love of God and of men pushed to the most utter contempt of self—the very foundation of our Faith—the stamp which, impressed on our works, renders them worthy of eternal life, and the sign of our salvation ? Now, my daughters, in taking upon yourselves the care of children, you are carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ. Spouses of Christ, you have given yourselves to Him in order to have no thoughts, wills, dispositions other than His. What He desired, you should desire ; what He loved, you should seek, and you should hate all that is opposed to Him. What do you think our Lord desired above all else for those men whom He taught ? He wished to see them devoted to God and man even as He was Himself. His great object was to fire them with love for virtue and for zeal to spread His word. He rejoiced

when He found great faith in them, and above all great charity. Finally, those whom He called His friends and His brethren were those who entered with a whole heart into that divine city where the laws of God reign alone in all hearts.

"This, therefore, my dear daughters, should be our supreme aim. . . . God has different designs for every soul: what is most to be desired is that each one should accomplish hers Our state is in itself more perfect, but only for those who are called to it: it is quite possible to be more perfect in another. The ultimate end of our efforts, therefore, should be not to make religious of the souls entrusted to our care, for the choice of these should be left to God and comes only from Him. Still less should it be to sanctify souls by the practices by which we sanctify ourselves, for these practices depend on our state of life, and only sanctify us because in our case they embody God's will for us and are there as duties which we are bound to perform. But I repeat: It is to draw souls from their innate egotism in order to induce them to give themselves up without reserve to the doing of God's will—that is to say, to all that is good and holy and generous, to their duties, great or small, to all that we are called by the love of virtue to perform.

I should even go so far as to say that whatever may be the signs of religious vocation that appear in a child, she should never be brought up with this view alone. Speak to her of other duties, and in the same language that you would to the rest; teach her even things which she would only require to know if she were living in the world. For, in the first place, young girls are liable to change their minds, and you might easily be led to believe in their vocations by the desire you have to detect signs of them. I am strongly opposed to this happening; for the marks of a Divine election should alone be consulted by you in the advice you may be called upon to give. On the other hand,

admitting that God had really reserved for Himself the child in whom you think you have seen signs of a religious vocation ; admitting that she would be faithful and would become a nun, you will still have rendered her a service in causing her to bring into the cloister the true idea of the difficult part a Christian woman has to play in the world. You owe, in your conduct as regards your relations with the children, respect for your vocation rather than the spirit of proselytism. Speak little to them about it, but always in such a manner as to give them a high esteem for it. I should wish that the child should honour your habit as a mysterious seal of Christ, whose likeness she sees reflected in you. . . . I will tell you a thought which has given me the greatest desire to become better : it is that it often happens that people judge our Lord by those who belong to Him. Do your best, then, that the child should not find a stumbling-block in the relationship which your vocation establishes between your soul and Jesus Christ. For this reason I should not like to see a too intimate familiarity between the mistresses and their pupils. Whilst such facilities as the superior thinks fit should be afforded for confidential intercourse between the mistresses and those under their charge, I should not wish that any kind of equality were established between them and us, but that we should, so to speak, rise above their young intelligences, as mothers by grace ; and by the truth, calm and wisdom which we draw from the fountain of grace enlighten them gently on the subjects about which they wish to speak to us."

Mother Marie Eugénie then warns them not to be too sanguine ; for our Lord's example and His parables teach us that it is only on good ground that the seed is multiplied a hundredfold. " If our education dated from the cradle, if what we said were the only words addressed to the child's intelligence, I know not even then if the young girl might not, when the occasion

comes when she is given the choice between sacrificing herself to others, or others to herself, use her liberty to go against us. In any case this hypothesis is an impossible one. Children will be brought to us with their characters already formed; when they are already conscious of good and evil, and more often of evil rather than of good; already selfish and self-indulgent in their habits. All we can do is to tell them the truth, as our Lord did of old, to show it to them in practice, to try and make them submit to it by fear and by love, to make them see with their own eyes the egotism of their hearts; and then to pray to God that these young souls may submit to the yoke of discipline and of virtue."

The holy superior then warns her daughters that they must be prepared for defects, vices even of a serious character amongst the children sent to them, but mingled with the evil they will always find some good, which they must trust to the mercy of God to strengthen and develop. "Trust," she goes on to say, "to the power of Christian practices; believe in the divine basis which the sacraments establish in the depth of the soul, and build your hopes upon them when all others fail. Your faith will communicate itself to the child; she will hope as you do; she will make an effort to respond to the confidence with which even the most abandoned soul never fails to be touched. . . . But in order to succeed, *you will have to love*—and do not think this is such an easy thing to do in cases when the defects are of a kind which inspire aversion in the object proposed to you for your love. It is in accordance with the spirit of our Rule, which has more in it of gentleness than severity, that I speak thus, but this sweetness entails also its sacrifices. At the beginning of the religious life, the soul which is no longer troubled by worldly cares, and has begun to taste of the sovereign sweetness of Jesus Christ, experiences frequently great sensible

love; this she pours out with joy on everyone she comes across, and when in that state she fails to understand how others find any difficulty in the exercise of the divine virtue. But as soon as He penetrates a little deeper into our hearts, and makes us share a little the weight of His cross, this sweetness will cease, making way for a dryness and bitterness of soul which cause us to find the smallest contact with our neighbour a heavy burden. It is then that the real virtue of charity, that which has gained for us all the tortures of Calvary, that of Jesus crucified, is born in and increased in us; that virtue whose knowledge we ought to have learnt when we accepted the symbol of it in order to wear it on our hearts. 'Place this sign of the cross on your heart,' the Church says to us on the day of our profession, and receiving the knowledge of the charity of Christ, learn to conform yourself in all things to Him who has offered Himself in sacrifice for you. . . .' Never lose courage. Raised above the endless mutability of human sentiments, you possess—and it will never fail you—the unalterable power of Jesus Christ: of Him whom nothing can weary, nothing can discourage, nothing can daunt, who never ceases to love you, and who is ever ready to pour out His divine charity on to the souls who belong to Him. When our hearts are wearied, when our soul is embittered, when fatigue and disgust and suffering seem to have deprived us of all our strength, let us go to Him, my dear daughters; let us allow Him to love in us; let us abandon ourselves to His power; and Jesus, whose love for us is greater than a mother's love, will teach perhaps even at that very moment the secret of a last effort by which we may conquer the child's defects. I am wrong: He will teach us that there should be no *last effort* for us, and that zeal for souls, any more than the love from which it springs, never says: It is enough."

Mother Marie Eugénie was not satisfied with

theorising only about the religious training which should be given to children. She saw the pupils frequently, put questions to them in order to draw them out, and took the greatest interest in their advancement. She herself gives an account of an occasion when she cross-examined one of the children, Henrietta Ryan, in order to ascertain her opinion on subjects unconnected with lesson-books.

"Yesterday we were talking at recreation about the government examination in institutions for the education of young girls. The examiners had asked of M. Levi's classes: 'What is meant by the beautiful? What is the true?' and other questions as little adapted to the comprehension of young children. The answers had to be put in writing and ten minutes was given to develop them. I wished to amuse myself by seeing what answers our children would make to questions of this kind, but more suitable to their years—for as to the two first it would take me some time to think what to say about them. Accordingly we summoned them and I asked Henrietta what appeared to her to be the most beautiful of human things.

"After a moment's hesitation she said, 'Virtue, *ma Mère*.'

"'And what would you look upon as the highest amongst all titles, dignities and grandeurs?'

"'I think that of a priest.'

"'Now can you form an idea of the true? In what do you think it can be found?'

"'In the scriptures," she answered.

"These are but answers made by children to which no importance need be attached, but they prove that on subjects which had never been spoken about to them, they, of themselves, were ready with Christian ideas; that is all that we wished for." And Mother Marie Eugénie's biographer adds, "all that can be desired is that the child's education should be of such a nature as to cause her to reflect, and that she should

form by reflection Christian ideas. For in that case the basis of her mind and her soul are seen to be Christian; and it would give reason to hope that later on she would form the rule of her judgments and the springs of her conduct on the principles of her faith. It may also be remarked that the education received by the pupils of the Assumption, though idealistic and Christian as regards their minds, was at the same time practical and positive, inasmuch as it was enlightened by experience and brought in constant contact with *facts*. It was on these lines that Mother Marie Eugénie sought to train her daughters; she felt the need of truth, and possessed the sense of it in all things and above all things. Her object was to form characters distinguished for their judgment and straightforwardness; souls of 'good-will.' In her eyes what was most essential in education was to teach children to fight against their natural love of self, and to discern their duties whatever they might be, great or small, in the course of their journey through life." [1]

[1] *Fondatrice*, p. 159.

CHAPTER X

"Too little does he love Thee who loves anything with Thee which he loveth not for Thee." ST AUGUSTINE.

IF, as it has often been said, our Lord never visits His servants without bringing His Cross with Him, He unquestionably came to the community at the Impasse des Vignes in the spring of 1842, when one of its members, the youngest and last to join, Sister Marie Joséphe, was attacked with symptoms of phthisis of a very alarming nature. This was a great sorrow to all her Sisters in religion and especially to the Superior who had formed a high opinion of her and felt that she might be expected to render great future service to the Congregation. The doctors recommended a course of waters at the Eaux-Bonnes in the Pyrenees as the only possible way of saving her life, and accordingly, early in the month of July, she was sent there with a lay-Sister. Here we are told she made such good use of her time that she succeeded in persuading a lady who had given up her faith to go to confession. She also made the acquaintance of the Rector of the Foreign Missions who so far had been much prejudiced against the Congregation, having heard that they were "learned" and "great ladies." Sister Marie Josèphe was successful in dissipating these false ideas.

"M. l'Abbé Dumarsais is on very friendly terms with me now," she wrote, "he comes to see me nearly every day. One of the worst charges that he brought up against us was that we read St Thomas—an unforgivable crime. I assured him this did not prevent our learning the catechism. This calmed him a little. He asked me what our method of education was; I

answered as best I could, laying stress specially on the simple and well-grounded education we wished to give our children. He seemed delighted."

Sister Marie Josèphe returned to the Impasse des Vignes where she was joyfully welcomed by the community, full of hope for the future, but the dread disease returning, her Superior sent her once more to the Eaux-Bonnes as a last hope. Like so many attacked with this malady, she buoyed herself up almost to the last with hopes of recovery and when this was seen by her to be impossible, she begged to be taken back to Paris. It was while she was in this state of anguish of body and mind that Mother Marie Eugénie wrote to her, holding up for her imitation the example of a holy nun who had died not long before :

" Sister Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament said that we should find in the Cross what we could find nowhere else and when deprived of receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord in Communion, she consoled herself by communion with His sufferings. This is what He has given you for your portion, my dear daughter, none could show His love more nor unite you more closely with Him. Put all your trust in this ; widen your confidence. God takes count of every tear and of every sigh. He treasures up every weary moment of yours by day and by night. Offer them up to Him with a sure hope of receiving in reward an eternal treasure which you purchase with this price. Say with St Paul : *Scio cui credidi.* Believe me, my child, the entire loss of all we cling to will mean the attainment of our true happiness. Is this language too stern, my dear little child ? No, it is the language of my faith, of my certitude—may it be that of your hope."

This letter evoked an answer which showed a complete response on the part of the dying nun to the appeal made to her. Mother Marie Eugénie was not satisfied with writing only ; knowing what a consolation her presence would be, she started off for Eaux-

Bonnes and arrived there on the 22nd of June. She was in time to prepare Sister Marie Josèphe for the Last Sacraments which the latter still hoped to receive in Paris. At the voice of obedience, however, she received them with the utmost devotion and perfect resignation to the Divine Will, and without a sigh or passing struggle gave up her pure and innocent soul to God.

Her death took place on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul; she was buried in the little cemetery of Louvic. Mother Marie Eugénie had the consolation of following her to the grave and of feeling that many Masses and prayers were being offered up for her and that her short life had been productive of much good and edification.

The year of 1843, which opened so sadly for the community with the last illness of Sister Marie Josèphe, finished by bringing them a considerable accession to their numbers. Four postulants presented themselves in the autumn of that year, and two more in the early months of the following one. It is not astonishing to find that the Sisters attributed these vocations to the prayers of Sister Marie Josèphe. The special task of forming a religious spirit in them was confided by the superior to Sister Thérèse Emmanuel. We find it said of her that "she had an equal knowledge—and this in a very rare degree—of the interior life and of what was required for the practical side of it." In her great experience of the mystical ways by which God leads souls was allied to great prudence as to their conduct. Her habitual prayer was that of contemplation; she kept, even in the midst of her occupations, that state of union with God in which the soul is "acted upon" rather than acts. This did not prevent her from being attentive to all the details of an active life, or of putting the accomplishment of duty above all else, in everything and everywhere.

Duty, regularity, was for her—and she taught this to her novices by word and example—the primary foundation of the spiritual and the religious life.

In her general instructions and in particular her direction of souls, she never ceased recommending obedience and poverty. "Obedience must be prompt, exact, joyful, eager; the soul should lean by preference towards what is least, poorest, the most inconvenient, and towards the humblest offices in the house; and this from contempt of created goods and from a high esteem of eternal ones."—"Too covetous is he to whom God does not suffice," she used to say, quoting St Francis of Assisi. She exacted from the novices a great respect for the smallest customs which had been established in the community, doubtless because there is a constant sacrifice of self-will in such minute observances. Far from being influenced by an empty spirit of formalism, she founded the humblest practices on high thought and aspirations. "A religious Order," she was accustomed to say, "is a divine idea for the salvation of souls, realised by feeble creatures who give up all—their lives, their past—in order to devote themselves to this one object. The Assumption is this divine idea for us."

The great task in these beginnings was to found the traditions of the Congregation. Accordingly, Mother Thérèse Emmanuel often said to her novices: "We live in the days when the spirit of the Assumption is being formed; we are the source of the Congregation, its origin. Its traditions will be formed on our conduct." The Office was the subject of her particular care. She did her utmost to establish the liturgical usages of the ancient Orders in the Assumption, to the extent that the difference of times and obligations permitted. On this point, as indeed on all others, she and Mother Marie Eugénie were in complete sympathy. The union between these two souls was always so perfect that it seemed as if God had created

one for the other, because the fusion of their distinctive qualities and the graces given them was necessary to form the characteristic spirit and life of the Congregation. It was an instance of Martha and Mary; but with the particular characteristic that the activity of Martha was deeply imbued with the spirit of prayer, and that Mary admired nothing more than Martha's prudence, and when engaged in active duties was ever busy in obeying the Rule which governed its exterior.

It was during the course of the year 1842 (and to a less extent during the preceding one) that the correspondence between M. d'Alzon and Mother Marie Eugénie, begun in 1838, was resumed, and that she put herself under his direction. In these letters the holy superior bares her soul utterly to her director; they are accordingly a valuable contribution to the knowledge we possess of her spiritual life. In one of them she writes: "I must tell you that for some time I have learned much from the falls of Jesus beneath His cross. It seems to me that God calls to me to be often there, and to be as much humbled by my falls as oppressed by the weight of the Cross. . . . May He be glorified by the stupidities I commit; may He teach others by means of the mistakes I make. I shall always find in Jesus Christ the power to raise myself to perform what He asks of me, and I should never wish for anything more, for that is sufficient to unite me to and subject me utterly to God. If our Lord gave me great graces I should appropriate them to myself, and how little honour would a soul which is so cowardly in suffering as mine give to Him!" Again she writes, "Yesterday I was moved in my prayer to adore the solitude of Jesus, '*factus sine adjutorio*.' This impression lasted me a whole day. I think our Lord wills that I should address myself to Him as our Founder even in the smallest difficulties. I have made a novena of Communions in order to lay down the

cares and anxieties of my charge in the Heart of Jesus, and while I was doing this He strengthened me and gave me a proof of His protection. Nearly a month ago, when I was still suffering, I was vividly impressed with the thought that I should leave Jesus Christ to act in me, and that my being—bound, helpless, unenlightened, useless as it is—should have no object except that of following His Sacred Humanity. I was made to understand that perhaps I should have no one to lean upon, not even someone who would be a source of trial to me (as M. Combalot was with regard to the Foundation) and that I should have no sense of safety nor of rest even in obedience. I was told: What prevents you from doing what Jesus Christ would do in your place? Is it necessary in order to do this that you should find rest in anything, or in any person? . . . *He* would take care that the Rule was kept, that the nuns were fervent, the children zealously trained, that the studies were Christian in their aim, that temporal matters were exact, poor, prudent and humble. Do these things by His will with the inclination you know He would bring to bear upon them. His will should suffice you; His inclination suffice for yours. What business have you to wish to feel it, or to wish to find it in yourself or others?"

The following letter is dated 20th March:

"During this Lent adoration of the mystery of the Incarnation and preparation for the feast has been my prevailing thought. What has also served to nourish my devotion was to assist at Mass as if it was a marriage feast, and in going to Communion to pronounce an 'I will' in assent to a true alliance with Jesus Christ—annihilated, poor, dependent, humbled, suffering as He is in the Host. This morning I felt strongly that what God asked of me in order to lead me by the way of the Incarnation was the *silence of my nature;* not by the Cross, by efforts, or by repugnances, but by a constant silence of the most far-reaching nature.

This word *silence* is the one which explains most clearly my meaning; in action it is the silence of my activities, of my tastes, of my way of seeing things: in short, the silence of my whole nature, in order to learn how to allow Him to work who has the sole right to direct all that I do."

On the 5th of June 1842, she writes:

"I have much appreciated lately my good fortune in having been by various accidental circumstances brought into personal relations with you. Other people's charity even has frightened me; and it appears to me that in spite of great personal holiness—of which there was no question in the cases I speak of—they have nevertheless done me harm by their extreme mistrust of all that it appears to me God asks of me. To act in this way seems to me to set the importance of God's leading at naught; and since the things He asks of me are very trying to me, and since all the lights which come to me in prayer attract me to an interior abnegation which I dread, I should be quite capable of submitting to a direction which would withdraw me from them, re-assuring myself with the pretext of obedience and fidelity to my exterior duties.

"I must acknowledge to you that what you say to me has not that effect on me. I even think it has had a contrary one: that of urging me to the sacrifices which I am aware my conscience asks of me—at least you throw me back upon it; and however scrupulous I may be, I do not think that the clinging I have to your direction could ever give me more uneasiness than does the longing which I have in the depths of my soul to accomplish, at whatever cost, God's designs for me. It costs me much to bend to the yoke of the Holy Spirit; I resist Him, and I resist you interiorly, because I feel you are of the same mind. It would, however, be a thousand times harder for me to be turned away from it, and when I should perceive in myself that I had no longer this urgent desire to die

to myself, my misery would be unbounded. Thus, Father, I ask for nothing better than to trust my soul's guidance to you. Do you consent to taking charge wholly of me ? I, on my side, only reserving to myself the care of obeying you, and rendering to you account of my soul ? You will then be truly my Father, and up to this time I have not dared to look at your direction in this light."

In a letter from M. d'Alzon which has been preserved (almost all belonging to this period were accidentally destroyed), he makes an allusion to this thirst for annihilation which Mother Marie Eugénie so often mentions.

" I ask for nothing better, my daughter, than to oblige you to listen in the depths of your soul to this severe voice which is so jealous of your obedience ; and to oblige you to open your eyes in order that you should read in the book of the special covenant alliance made between God and you, *in tabulis cordis carnalibus*, and it is in this light that I would ask you to take note of your faults, since God having agreed to treat you as a friend, sin and infidelity would lower you to the rank of slave. . . . To be an executioner is not an office I would willingly undertake, but that of pontiff pleases me much, and since I immolate Jesus Christ I warn you that it will be a joy for me to crucify you in the same manner as I crucify our Lord." These were no idle words. Mother Marie Eugénie's director saw that God was asking great sacrifices of her in order to reward her with great graces, and he was determined to second the work of the Holy Spirit in her soul. Accordingly we find him urging her " to incline to the duties which she finds most trying ; to accept amorously the sight of her misery and incapacity, to take pleasure in contemplating her ugliness, and to take satisfaction in her repugnances." Such are the expressions which recur at intervals in his letters. As to his holy penitent, we know that her obedience to him was unreserved

and that she made no change or modification in her way of life without notifying them to him.

Nature, however, sometimes rebels, and it was on a certain occasion when it was very visible to her daughters that she was overtaxing her strength that she wrote (August 1842) to M. d'Alzon as follows: "Sister Thérèse Emmanuel will not allow me to fast on Fridays; and they oblige me to rest, as I have been suffering, and that not a little. I have been spitting blood for some days; and since I slept the last time on a plank I have had a pain in the chest which prevents me from saying office in choir. As they find me getting worse from day to day, I am going, unless you disapprove of it, to allow myself to be nursed, and with your permission I will leave off my exterior mortifications."

We learn what these mortifications were from the correspondence between the director and his penitent: To sleep upon a plank; to fast on all Fridays; to wear an iron chain round the waist, and sometimes a hair shirt at night; to take the discipline to the extent of drawing blood; never to drink anything but water; to mix absinth with her food; always to pray on her knees; to rise at half-past-four, and not to go to bed till eleven o'clock in order to give more time to work or prayer, to take upon herself fatiguing work, such as carrying water, washing the dishes, nursing sick Sisters or children; and when any object inspired her with disgust, to kiss it.

That these austerities had their usual effect when performed under holy obedience we learn from these extracts from her letters:

"Directly I have been forced to vanquish my cowardliness on some point, I feel such a joy in my soul that I can hardly contain it." And in another place we find, "I must acknowledge to you that exterior mortifications give birth to a joy and a peace in my soul proportionate to the first repugnance with

which they had inspired me. I am too happy to have made this offering to God, and to feel that on this point I have given up all. It is a link which I sever ; and at last I can say that I obey in everything, and that there are no bounds in my abandonment of myself to God's good pleasure."

There was another motive, besides that of doing violence to self, which inspired Mother Marie Eugénie with a great love of penance and mortification. It came from zeal for souls. This thought, as we have seen continually in her life and correspondence, was a dominant one in determining her vocation. It influenced her both as regards her family and others, and in short towards all who had the misfortune of losing their faith, or, worse still, those who had been brought up without faith, and only knew enough of God to blaspheme Him.

It was in this spirit that she made the following prayer, which she put into writing on the feast of the Assumption 1842.

" I would fain, O my God, give Thee a special proof of love on this feast which has been for me a day of such special mercies ; on which I received the religious Habit, and on which I pronounced my vows. I give myself therefore up altogether to what by the light of Thy grace I see to be most holy and perfect. I renounce the inclination of saying to myself that I am not obliged to make certain sacrifices ; I wish on the contrary to oblige myself to perform any work of perfection that Thou askest of me. Accordingly I take upon myself the weight of my brother's sins ; I offer myself from this day forward to bear all the pains and shame of all the faults committed against Thee, and I desire to put no bound to this offering I make except those of Thy will and of obedience. Lay to my charge the faults of all my people—of those who are nearest to me, or those who are only distantly related to me ; if this is pleasing to Thee, I beg of Thee that

it should be so. Treat me as if I were an object of detestation in Thine eyes, if this should contribute to Thy glory I ask it of Thee."

God answered the prayer of His servant, and Mother Marie Eugénie found herself plunged into great spiritual desolation in which she cried to Him "out of the depths," and He appeared to turn a deaf ear to her. "And yet," she wrote to her spiritual father, "I ask of Him who raised the dead to life for a spiritual resurrection, for I am terrified at the state in which I find myself. God only can save me. I find myself losing all hope and confidence. I think of the efforts which I should make to relieve the mind of another who was in this state, but I feel incapable of using the means which I should employ with them. At matins this evening I had a moment's relief in thinking that this incomprehensible anguish might be offered as a homage to Jesus in the agony—when 'He began to be sorrowful and sad.' The greatest of my pains comes from feeling a sort of blank in my soul with regard to Jesus when I desire to unite myself with Him, as in a case when one could neither see, nor hear, nor remember the voice or appearance, nor even form an idea of the person one loved. Without Him I care for nothing, everything is bitter to me—all my attraction to good is based on Him. Where is He, my Saviour, He whom I looked upon with such entire confidence as Spouse, Advocate, the life and the love of my soul? Why has He left me whilst I was only making changes in my life in order to serve Him better?"

To these lamentations M. d'Alzon made answer:

"Be generous, my daughter, and enter into these ways of desolation, hard as they may seem to you. I had not quite understood what you told me about the state of oblation which you had taken upon yourself for your relations; but if you are willing to earn their salvation by suffering, confusion, and despair, I would

say to you : If you are urged to restrict your sacrifice to them only, do so ; if not, extend it to all sinners. '*Hoc sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu.*' Here indeed is an occasion to recall those words. It is there, my daughter, that I call upon you to suffer, and though unfortunately I have nothing to suffer, I unite with you in offering the sufferings of my God, in whom I hide myself, and those of my daughter, who suffers in order to unite herself with Jesus, the spotless Lamb, and to help Him to purify sinners." That the veil was gradually lifted, so that the holy superior could see what lay beyond the trials she was undergoing and the meaning of them, we perceive from a letter which was written a little later.

" For some days past I have had a strong attraction to dwell on our Lord's Passion ; in my last retreat it appeared to me that I should enter into the state of victim, and that I had never sufficiently thought of this, the fundamental effect of the religious profession, and even of Baptism. Since then I apply myself to offering each day in union with the offering Jesus Christ made in the morning of His Passion. This makes me more exact in my mortifications, and makes me reject with even more contempt than usual the little satisfactions which, though the privation of them unquestionably would not suffice to make a victim of me, yet from the comfort I derive from them would make that term utterly illusory."

We constantly come across in Mother Marie Eugénie's letters allusion to Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, and we perceive by them how deep was the sympathy which existed between these two holy souls, in spite of superficial differences of character.

" Sister Thérèse Emmanuel does not always understand me," she wrote on one occasion, " because though our attractions resemble each other on certain points, their sources differ. Hers are purer, more elevated, more holy. As for me, I know God as a child knows

its mother. The thought of the goodness of God seems to melt the ice between Him and me. When I speak of His justice, of His holiness, of all His perfections, I desire truly to honour them, but it is through His goodness that He is *my God*, and I have often given myself up to the adoration of this one perfection, in which I see His eternity, His infinity and His omnipotence. Everything comes easy to me with these thoughts; nothing stops me. What does anything matter when I rest on the bosom of my God?"

The following notes of the annual retreat made by Mother Marie Eugénie in the year 1842 were found amongst her papers.

"Oh what a joy the liberty of being able to love gives one!" she writes on the first day. "I almost reproach myself for feeling so happy, so gay even, in retreat, but this gaiety which rises from the heart will make my fidelity all the more sincere, and I feel myself ready to make any sacrifice. What a pleasure it is to make a retreat!"

A little later she writes: "Three days of my dear retreat are over. I am making it in what I feel to be the most profitable manner; my Sisters have promised me an absolute solitude; I have no cause for breaking my silence—not even to speak of my interior life—since I have no one to whom I need speak. I am alone with God. I spend most of the day in the chapel; I meditate on the virtues of Jesus Crucified. And I find myself so happy in this life of silence, of prayer, and of tears, that I am tempted to say it is no illusion on my part, this secret desire which I have often felt to lead a more contemplative life than ours. But, on the other hand, when I see the great graces God has bestowed on me, it seems to me that He would never have given them to such a creature as I am, unless it was to compensate for the trials and distractions of my office, and that thought makes me love it. . . . It is nc easy thing to mingle the active and the con-

templative life together. One must be very holy in order to perform exterior actions with a spirit of faith. It is infinitely easier to fix and maintain oneself in the supernatural order, when one is physically separated from all that appeals to one in the natural order.

"To see God in all: to act and yet to be attentive only to the graces attached to our actions as regards ourselves and others—to do this we require a much greater fidelity and a much more difficult and continual sacrifice of our tastes and our own will. Still, I believe that this is what the Daughters of this Congregation are called to do; and having taken upon themselves the settled purpose to submit their minds as well as their wills to our Lord, they can only acquire the special spirit proper to the Congregation by renouncing all tastes, actions, and even judgments which Jesus Christ would not have in their place. I have never hesitated in my belief that we shall realise our object by having the spirit of the poorest and most fervent Orders, and that we should have an interior strictness in proportion to our outward practices being more lenient and our liberty of spirit greater than is the case with many. Our total dependence on Jesus Christ should be the secret bond, securing our interior and exterior liberty."

Mother Marie Eugénie sums up the graces she had received from our Lord in a letter to her director written at the end of this retreat.

"Do you know, my dear Father, that I owe you much gratitude? The graces given to me by God which I esteem the most have been the result of your direction, and the last one came to me from your counsels. I received in the first retreat of which I gave you an account a great increase of knowledge of the life and presence of Jesus Christ in us, with the inclination to submit myself to it in every action; a knowledge, too, that all virtues are founded on faith, hope and love, and that one should simplify one's

intention in the performance of those acts, and that this would be the cause of great peace of soul.

"The second grace, of which I still feel the effects, was the esteem and the knowledge of the excellence of the Divine Being who was given to me at the moment of my profession. It seems to me that there was kindled within me a love and desire which may at times have been obscured, but which will never be extinguished.

"The third were those powerful movements which drew me so powerfully towards Jesus Christ crucified, in my trials of last winter.

"Finally, the fourth is that since the last feast of the Assumption I have received a kind of liberty of heart and mind, with the facility of occupying my soul with divine things, both in keeping myself in God's presence, and in fostering inwardly thoughts of self-contempt; of the desire of acquiring such or such virtues or in reposing all my aspirations on the joyous certainty that whatever happens God's will must be accomplished. These considerations have worked much good in me, even in other people's sight.

"I cannot for a moment doubt that these precious gifts were in some degree the result of the mortifications which grace asked of me and which I have only practised perseveringly when obedience imposed them on me. I have been urged before God to explain this to you and to beg of you to mortify me much with this view.

"It appeared to me that in order that I should be made worthy that God should accomplish all His designs in me, I have to get rid of all the disturbance of fears, oppositions and desires, so that I may be in the state of holy indifference of which St Francis de Sales speaks with regard to all earthly occurrences, and that my soul should be equally calm and free towards all God's dispensations without any regard to what is pleasing or displeasing to me."

In the following lines, taken from Mother Marie Eugénie's letters to her director, we have an admirable commentary on the words which were constantly on her lips, and still more in her heart : " Thy Kingdom come."

" This morning, on my way to the Archbishop, I entered the church of Notre-Dame. God gave me a great sense of His presence there. The thought came to me in that place where I once had received the grace of a strong and determined will to conquer every obstacle in order to labour for the increase of God's kingdom—to give up all in order to enlist in His army—that possibly I then only saw the temporal reign of Jesus Christ. But *He* saw His interior reign in my heart, and whilst I only thought of the mission He might have for me, He led me by a secret attraction of love to the sole end of possessing me and making my heart His own. I felt that, possibly, it might be necessary for me at the present moment, in order to surrender myself to His jealous love, to give up even the preoccupation caused by those thoughts which had formerly separated me from the world. I then made the sacrifice to God of never occupying myself, if He wished it, with anything but what concerned the union of my soul with Him ; but at the same time I implored Him to preserve in me this spirit of love for His reign on earth. *Opportet illum regnare.*"

These words, besides being the leading idea and main aspiration of Mother Marie Eugénie's life, were also those of the Congregation founded by her.

" It is not possible," she continues, " that the words of Jesus Christ were not intended to lead to the earthly regeneration of humanity and its social laws. The ideas now in vogue may obscure the certainty ; I may not myself seize it ; but this poverty, this dim night of my intelligence does not cause it the less to exist, or prevent my faith hailing it through my darkness. In the same way that the workmen of old laboured at

the erection of our cathedrals many work in ignorance of what they are accomplishing for the city of the future. I have long told myself that if required I must accept that rôle. There are many that work for it against their will, like the Romans who made their roads for the preachers of the Gospel. I have therefore restricted myself to repeating that prayer which is so dear to me, 'Thy kingdom come,' and to try to 'hallow' His name by striving for a greater charity, which would by a greater humility and submission on my part, make me more truly represent His divine goodness towards our Sisters, and so tend to our union and advancement in the paths of virtue."

CHAPTER XI

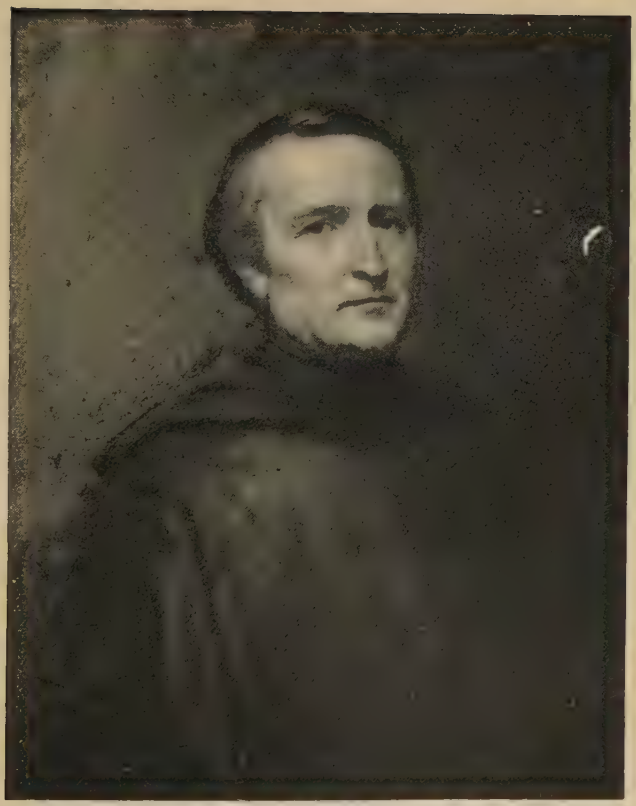
"You ne'er attained to him." "If to attain
Be to abide, then that may be."
Endless the way, followed with how much pain!
The way was He.

ALICE MEYNEL.

THOUGH the correspondence between Mother Marie Eugénie and M. d'Alzon was renewed when he became her director, they had not met since the Abbé's visit to Châtenay in 1839. But business in the month of August 1843 brought the latter to Paris, and during the week that he stayed there, he had frequent interviews with the holy superior.

The name of M. d'Alzon will be so often mentioned in connection with the work of the Assumption and its first superior and Foundress, that a short account of his life may not be without interest to the readers of her biography.

Emmanuel d'Alzon was the only son of parents remarkable even more for their piety and faith than for the gifts of fortune. He was born on the 30th of August 1810, at the Château du Vigan. We read of the family that "the nobility of their name and a great patrimony handed down to them by their ancestors were in their eyes but a means of doing more good and a title to giving a good example; they were looked upon as a Providence by those who lived in that country." Many stories are told of the youthful precocity of the boy Emmanuel, which, though they may be of less interest to the matter-of-fact Briton than to his neighbours on the other side of the Channel (for which reason we omit them) prove unmistakably that he had more than the usual share of high spirits, as exemplified by his practical jokes; also that he began very early



Père d'Alzon.

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to show symptoms of piety and a predilection for the priesthood. His early education was conducted at home by a clerical tutor, who was also probably chaplain to the family. At the age of thirteen he was sent to Paris to complete his classical studies, first as day-scholar at the Collège St Louis, and afterwards at that of Stanislas. Later on we hear of his being sent to study for the Bar. It was at this period of his life, when living in Paris, that he came under the influence of M. Bailly, who was a leader at that time of all good works in the capital. He soon became acquainted with other young men of this generation with similar aspirations, such as Montalembert, de Coux, du Lac, Cornudet and others. The leading thought of these youths was the regeneration of France in a Catholic sense ; and to effect this there were some among them who were ready to sacrifice all earthly ambitions, their lives, even, had God asked it of them. This devotion to the highest of all causes could not have been put in a more striking manner than it was by Montalembert in his *Monks of the West*, in words which, though often quoted, will never lose their charm.

" My only weapon is a chill and melancholy pen, and I am the first of my race who has fought with nothing but a pen. But may it at least serve with honour, may it become in its turn a sword in the keen and holy fight of conscience, for the disarmed majesty of justice against the triumphant oppression of falsehood and evil."

These men were powerfully supported in their efforts and aspirations by such apostolic priests as Gerbet, Combalot, Salinis, Dupanloup. But the dominating influence—dominating by force of intellect and character—was undoubtedly that of the Abbé de Lamennais. Emmanuel d'Alzon fell under the spell of his charm and genius like the rest ; and it was only his father's strongly expressed wishes which prevented him from following Lamennais when he buried himself

in the solitude of La Chesnaie and adding to the number of his disciples. All this time God was speaking to the young man's heart, attracting him to His service. If he delayed it was only because it was hard for him to resist his father's pleadings to remain in the world and marry; for he was the last of his race, the only one left to carry on the name and fortunes of the family. Doubtless it was to spare his father as well as himself a painful parting that he left his home in November 1831, only a few months after attaining his majority, at night, taking leave of no one, and went to the Seminary at Montpellier, where he was expected and welcomed with open arms. After receiving minor Orders there, he went on to Rome to continue his ecclesiastical studies. He was ordained on 26th December 1834, and celebrated his first Mass at St John Lateran's on the following day, the feast of St John the Baptist. M. d'Alzon's vocation to the priesthood was looked upon by those who were acquainted with his character, piety and talents, as a great gain to the Church of France. "On his return from Rome," we read, "his commanding height, his fine countenance, his solid and varied acquirements, his quick and brilliant mind, and above all his great soul which found an outlet in all kinds of good works, sometimes in abundant alms, at others in great undertakings, everything attracted attention to him and commanded a sympathetic attitude towards him."

Two dioceses claimed d'Alzon on his return to France; for his parents were at that time living on their property of Lavagnac which was in the diocese of the Hérault, and he had passed through the Seminary of Montpellier. It was, however, in the diocese of Nîmes that he was born, and he was at once claimed on that plea by its Bishop, Mgr de Chaffoy, who attached him to its service by appointing him temporary Vicar-General. A little later, he became, and remained for the rest of his life, titulary Vicar-General, and under

this title he became associated with the diocesan administration of all the bishops who succeeded each other in turn in the see of Nîmes.

M. d'Alzon only spent a week in Paris on the occasion we have mentioned; but during that time the foundation was laid between him and Mother Marie Eugénie of a holy friendship, and of mutual confidence which was never afterwards interrupted. He wrote the following letter to her from Lyons on his homeward journey:

"In a few hours, my dear child, the Rhône will have put eighty more leagues between us. I will not allow the day to pass without thanking you for the good you have done me. I went to Paris pleased with the anticipation of meeting you, and above all with the hope—a slightly conceited one—of being able, possibly, to do you good. Have I done *you* as much good as that which you have done me? To have done so is my most ardent wish. I profited from your last recommendation. I prayed for you on my journey, and, astonishing to relate, it appeared to me that I had recovered that liberty of heart towards our divine Master which I had reproached myself for a long time for having lost. My reflections took the line of making me ask myself what God wished of me: this was in consequence of our conversations. Nothing new has come of it. It seems certain that I am where I should be. As long as His will places me there, there I shall remain. It is not for the first time that what I said to your Sisters, about the triumph which it appears to me our Lord will reap in our days, has struck me. What is your opinion? I look upon His twofold action within us from this point of view. He comes in the first place to take refuge in the souls of those He loves, in order, as it were, to protect Himself from His persecutors; and then He makes use of them as a means of assuring His victory. Hence His disciples lie under the double obligation of estab-

lishing His reign within and without. You, my daughter, are happy, after having been brought up far from God, in having been called to love Him in your own soul, and in the pure and beautiful souls of the Sisters who have been confided to you."

Mother Marie Eugénie answered in a letter dated 18th August, " My heart has been singularly at peace since our conversation on the last day you were here. Joy and liberty have returned to me, with a renewal of a simple and more direct manner of going to God which I had lost, and from which I seemed to be getting further every day. I have no more fears now, as I feel you understand me. I found you also very kind and indulgent, I do not say to my faults, as that I should never wish you to be, but for the dispositions of my soul. In short, it is no longer a case of having to submit to your direction. I abandon myself to it, rather, in a filial sense, peacefully, with full confidence that it will take into consideration all that I am capable of in God's service. Now that the week is over I recall a number of things which I cannot understand that we did not discuss. But, as regards matters that affect you and myself, I think we had a thorough explanation ; and it is that which has done me so much good.

" It is also a happiness to me to think that you left Paris more fervently disposed, and your heart more free. It would be impossible for me to say how much I have thought of you in the presence of God. I again this morning offered up my Communion that your soul may increase in perfection."

Though in this first exchange of letters between the director and his penitent the personal note predominates, the succeeding ones turn almost wholly on the affairs of the Congregation. Mother Marie Eugénie writes a little later. " M. Gaume has been here, and has made us renew our vows for a year, promising to obtain for us a definite approval before the conclusion

of that time. He wishes to look over the Rule with us before submitting it to the Archbishop. He will then make his remarks upon it and we ours." This having been done she forwards a little later on M. Gaume's observations to M. d'Alzon and asks his advice.

"The total result," she writes, "in my opinion is that we shall have to make many modifications of the Rule. Why not then profit by this circumstance for making all the changes which we may judge useful? If nothing had to be changed, there would be the advantage of stability; but if a great deal has to be altered it would be better to have it more completely according to our ideas—simpler, and with a more marked religious character, which would ensure greater stability for the future. I have talked this over with our Sisters, who are all of the same opinion; and I conclude from this that I should do well to work at it with Sister Thérèse Emmanuel.

M. d'Alzon's answer was wholly in agreement with this view: "I highly approve," he writes, "of your making the necessary changes once for all; but it would be better if you did not tie yourself down as regards certain points on which you are not yet fully enlightened, and which you might insert later in the customs or observance from the experience you will have gained."

Mother Marie Eugénie writes a little later: "I feel myself strongly urged to work at the Constitutions; and see how useful your journey and the conversations we have had have been to me on this subject! Sister Thérèse Emmanuel has on her side consulted God and received great promises, and the assurance that He wills above all to consecrate us to His Son, and only by Him to our neighbour. I do not know what designs our Lord has upon that soul, but He has bestowed marvellous graces upon her, which makes me believe that He has also designs of conferring them on our

work. I should much wish that this should be suggested to a certain extent in the Rule.

"M. Gaume wishes us to re-write the chapter on "The ends of the Institute." This is giving me a good deal of anxiety. We have not established our footing sufficiently for me to dare to explain our object such as I conceive it to be: namely a contemplative life enlightened by study on religious questions, and itself the source of an active life of faith, zeal for souls, and liberty of spirit.

"The real object, the true *cachet* of our work is, I consider, its interior dedication to such and such divine mysteries to which it will constitute a constant and perpetual source of homage. I believe we are called to honour the mystery of the Incarnation, and the Sacred Person of Jesus Christ, and in particular the union of the Blessed Virgin with Jesus Christ; this thought is the predominant one in our views about education.

"M. Gaume thinks that we have too contemplative a tendency. He has told me often that we shall not be able to keep to the two-fold obligations of the contemplative and active life. He finds fault with the obligation of reciting the Divine Office contained in the third chapter; and I, perhaps, expressed myself badly in my strong opposition to his view. As he constantly repeats that our life is an active one, I, to a certain extent, denied it, telling him that there is not one of our Sisters who does not cling above all to the obligations of a religious life; that we look upon education as our duty, but that our attraction was to a religious life."

M. d'Alzon highly approved of the line taken by Mother Marie Eugénie, "What you said to M. Gaume about the Office was quite right. You might quote the Brothers of the Christian Schools in support of your contention. I was talking not long ago with their superior-general about a College which is about

The Chapel, Paris.

to be founded by them; he told me he had resolved to put a considerable number of religious in it, because it was the only means of giving to all the necessary time for maintaining the spirit of their state of life by prayer and other religious exercises." In the same letter M. d'Alzon asks what line she proposes taking about the ornamentation of her chapels; whether she inclines to the views of St Teresa and St Ignatius who thought no decoration could be excessive when employed with that object, or of the Capuchins who preserved simplicity there as elsewhere. Her answer is dictated by her usual common-sense and broad-mindedness.

"With regard to the examples you give of St Teresa and St Ignatius I should like to draw your attention to the times in which they lived. Heretics in those days attacked Jesus Christ by the destruction of thousands of the Church's ornaments; whereas in our times it is a sentimental religiosity which attacks Him; one without any spirit of Christianity—a laxity of soul and a purely artistic devotion." She says she is strongly drawn to poverty and simplicity in the decoration of chapels. "But the times we live in must be taken into account. We must also show consideration for their wants and their weaknesses. Exterior cult is a language; it must be spoken in a way to make itself understood; we must strike children's senses in order to arouse their souls, and to nourish faith and piety."

No doubt the holy Foundress had these thoughts in mind when writing the following article in the Constitutions:

"With regard to buildings, the religious, though maintaining simplicity in their schools and poverty in their cells, will sanction what is necessary to them with a view to inspiring their pupils with a sentiment for Christian art. Their chapels will be to them objects of a holy zeal; they will consecrate to them whatever

is required in order to manifest their love and devotion to the presence of our Lord in the most Holy Sacrament."

The vow of poverty was one which the Superior may be said to have clung to with all her heart and soul; and she returns to the subject many times in her observations about the Rule. Thus we find her saying, "Are you not also of the opinion that poverty maintains the spirit of prayer, and that when a community has its foundation on faith and is dependent upon labour and the blessing of God, it is much more fervent?" She then quotes the Venerable Bede's words that the most generous poverty is that which, having despised all possessions for God's sake, works in order to live and give alms. *Sic laborantes oportet suscipere infirmos.*

Mother Marie Eugénie proceeds to make a number of suggestions and observations on the practice of poverty in the various circumstances of religious life. M. d'Alzon's answer to these was, "Keep firm hold of the practice of poverty wherever it is possible; it is only too easily lost." He also asks a very pertinent question, "You express a desire that the houses should be plainly and poorly built, but do you make a distinction between that part given up to the community and that assigned to the school? Here are two pitfalls; on the one hand an appearance of too much poverty in the school keeps off parents, and a sumptuous school soon degenerates, as it has done in a number of cases, into an abode of luxury." He then underlines—marking them with his approval—words in the Rule which sum up both his and Mother Marie Eugénie's views of what constitutes holy poverty: these are 'The strict moderation in the use of necessary things.' "This is perfect, for that explains the spirit of the vow, and you would do well to develop it somewhat. The rest refers more to material conditions."

On the question of the government of the Congre-

gation, there was again a great deal to be said and discussed. For the time being it was constituted under the authority of the Archbishop of Paris; but contingencies had to be provided for in the event of communities passing from under his jurisdiction. The Abbé was also of the opinion that it was not necessary for the Rule to be concluded at once. He suggested that it should be compiled by degrees, after making a trial of the difficult points. He was not without fears, also, of the responsibility which was thrown upon him by the Foundress, judging from the following:

"I received yesterday the articles of the Rule. I cannot tell you the kind of panic which seized me when I saw that several ideas which I had suggested had been adopted by you in the chapter on poverty. I felt that I had been taking all the responsibility on me for what I had said to you; and it is a very different thing giving personal advice, to making recommendations which will affect an entire community. However, I tried to advise you to the best of my power, and one must leave the rest to God."

The correspondence had reached this stage when Mother Marie Eugénie came to the conclusion that an exchange of letters was insufficient to meet the necessities of the case, and she writes to ask his authorisation to go to Nîmes, as events had made it impossible for him to meet her in Paris.

"The Rule is a vital question," we read, "and I am extremely desirous of getting it determined. I feel that it is the will of God that you should help me, and there is no one I can consult with the same confidence." M. d'Alzon answered: "Your letter has just been brought to me, and I own I was taken by surprise at your wishing to take counsel of me in the affairs of your Constitutions, to the extent of preferring it to what you could get where you are. But, putting aside the personal element, as between you and me, should a nun make a journey of two hundred

leagues without hesitation for a grave matter like this ? My answer is : yes. I shall pray fervently that your journey may be according to God's views and intentions, and that you and I may accomplish His will."

This letter was dated 23rd September 1884, and on the 10th of October, Mother Marie Eugénie, having received the Archbishop of Paris and M. Gaume's permission, started for Nîmes.

M. d'Alzon had written to inform her of the arrangements he had made, if not for her comfort, for her privacy and spiritual requirements during her stay at Nîmes, " You will be lodged here in such a manner as to see no one and be seen by no one, and you need not fear but that it will be in great poverty." The lodging in question was a former Benedictine monastery which had come into the possession of M. d'Alzon and had been turned by him into a Refuge, and was supported principally by his alms.

" My life here," Mother Marie Eugénie wrote to her Sisters, " is a very strict, I may almost say an austere one. I spend it in prayer, in taking a little exercise for the sake of my health, in preparing the questions I wish to ask M. d'Alzon, in seeing him and writing down his answers. We are going on slowly discussing the Rule. I am very much pleased with his conversations with me ; he is really devoted to our work. I find him so good and so devout ; and I am in hopes that my journey will be useful to the Congregation."

One of her thoughts on starting for Nîmes had been the possibility of laying down the heavy burden of her superiorship and getting someone else appointed in her place. She had already tried to get the Archbishop and M. Gaume to share her views, and she now made another attempt with M. d'Alzon. His answer after some reflection, was similar to that of her superiors; moreover he went so far as to forbid her to think of it or speak of it to others.

"You would be pleased," she wrote to her daughters, "with M. d'Alzon, if you knew how firmly he orders me to put away every thought and every word even, of misgiving on the subject of my superiority, or to dwell on any such things in the future. Well! I am pleased; for this strong assurance of God's will makes me doubly your Mother. No effort will ever be wanting on my part from being all that the word implies, difficult though I find it to believe that such a thing is possible for one so unworthy."

Sister Thérèse Emmanuel spoke for all her Sisters when she said that the holy superior's letter brought peace and happiness to the community. She ends her letter by saying: "Thank M. d'Alzon a thousand times from me for the command he gives you of being our Mother in heart and in guidance and in the trust you inspire. Yes! With you at the head of the work we shall make it holy. It will be your prayers which will obtain this grace for us. God will communicate your courage to us, for all good things will come to us with you." There was a holy unanimity in the little community on the subject of Mother Marie Eugénie's providential position as Foundress that could not fail to touch and comfort her.

"Your last letter," she wrote to Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, "went straight to my heart; not that I was unaware of your feelings towards me, but all the same I was deeply touched by it. How good you are, my daughters, to feel so affectionately towards your Mother. Your fervent resolutions to serve God perfectly, and your manner of telling me—for all this I cannot thank you sufficiently!" She goes on to announce her speedy return, and finishes by saying: "After a few more days to conclude our long conversations on the Rule, and about what touches my soul, I hope to get away so as to be with you in the early days of November. I am still in the same mind about being glad that I came, especially on account of the

good M. d'Alzon has done me. Perhaps this good is all the more efficacious on account of the solitude in which I live; I think he understands me better, and I am beginning to agree with him—and that is no small matter for the Congregation—that I should increase in zeal and in fervour for the discharge of my duties. I am filled with fresh hope of [spiritual] progress and am ready to take up our work with new courage, and to labour to develop and make it more perfect."

There was another subject which must have occupied Mother Marie Eugénie's thoughts during her stay at Nîmes in her interviews with M. d'Alzon of which she makes no mention, as it was not yet ripe for discussion with her community. This was a scheme formed by him of founding a Congregation of priests somewhat similar to that of the Assumption, and with the same objects in view: that is for working for the regeneration of society and for the education of youth. To trace this idea to its foundation we must go back six months.

In the month of June 1844 M. d'Alzon had been summoned to Turin by his sister, Madame de Puységur whose husband had been taken dangerously ill. While detained there, he had made use of the opportunity for studying the works of charity in that town. Many of these owed their origin to an indefatigable worker, and a very holy woman, the Marquise de Barol, who had devoted her large fortune to founding them. She had been a widow for some years when M. d'Alzon made her acquaintance, and was childless. It might have been said of her as it was of another benefactress of humanity, Mme de Villesavin, that "she was the very humble servant of the human race." Orphanages, clubs for young work-women, an association for visiting prisons, the Order of Sisters of St Anne, a hospital for crippled children owed their establishment to this admirable woman, whom Gregory XVI called the

"St Paula of our day." It has been said that the spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice is contagious in great souls; and M. d'Alzon had already, as we have seen, from his earliest years realised that love and sacrifice go hand in hand, so it need not surprise us to find that he was prepared to make a further advance in the pathway of the saints.

It was in this spirit and with these views that he wrote to Mother Marie Eugénie on 24th June 1844:

"My dear Daughter,

I must begin by owning to you, not without shame, that I have made a vow of which I hardly know how to speak to you. I was deeply struck one evening by the deplorable state to which the Church has been brought by the ambition of certain persons, and the next morning I made a vow at Mass to refuse all ecclesiastical dignities. It would be difficult for me to describe to you my feelings after having done this; all were not of an heroic order, needless to say, but what I wish to draw your attention to is, that after having done so, an idea which I formerly had, but which lately had become a mere dream of the past, has returned with fresh vigour. It is to devote myself to the work of forming a religious Community. This is equivalent to saying that I should like to have a talk with you; yet what am I capable of doing? Never have I had a clearer perception of my cowardice, my incompetence, my changeableness, my self-love. I sometimes say to myself that so many unworthy defects ought to put all such ideas out of my head, and again sometimes I feel that God in revealing them so strongly to me wishes to show me that if anything comes out of it, it is He who will have done all. You will perhaps ask me what will be the good of this Community? Alas! my dear child, if you ask this of my *reason* I should have a splendid plan to submit to you, but if

you ask the question of my supernatural consciousness, I should have to answer that so far I know nothing: and I rest on this thought, *God knows*. Also, what is very strange, in one sense, it appears to me that what God asks of me absolutely is that I should hold myself in readiness. What for? I do not know; it may be for my passage to eternity. In spite of this I feel a strong impulsion from the depths of my being towards something of which I cannot seize the details, but which I grasp confusedly notwithstanding. I feel also the reproach of not corresponding with grace; pray for me that I may disentangle this mystery. I think no sacrifice would be too great if the will of God manifested it to me."

This was what Mother Marie Eugénie replied to a letter which, as we feel in reading her answer moved her to her heart's depth.

"My very dear Father,

I have at last found a moment to talk over a subject with you which has occupied my thoughts more than any other since you wrote to me from Turin touching the renewal of your idea of founding an Order. I must own to you that I have difficulty in making a choice amongst the many feelings which rush to my mind with regard to it. Looking at myself as a voice which has come to your hearing, I fear to utter a false note by which I might mar the harmony of God's purpose. . . . Since we have established our work, I have longed with ever-increasing ardour that it should please God to cause an Order for men to be founded in His Church with a spirit resembling ours, to give young men, and especially young priests, a stronger, larger, more intelligent, more nobly Christian character. . . . What is obviously wanting for men in France at the present day are religious Orders which would be in touch with the

characters, the minds, and I might even say, the physical endurance of our times. If this is wanting in men who are called to the religious state, it is no less wanting in the action of these Orders in the different branches which come under their purview; and this is most particularly the case with regard to education. Since many are unjustly prejudiced against Jesuits, should it not be looked upon as the foremost of duties to raise another standard beside theirs in the army of the Cross? You will tell me such a thing would not be permitted: but I venture to say *it would.* If the head of it were in France, if the Constitutions bore a scientific and impartial character, and the individuals of which it was composed submitted to taking their degrees, and showed what they were worth, government would authorise them. What handicaps teaching Orders is their inferiority and limitations, of which I should like to give you the reasons in the light in which they strike me. This inferiority, for you and for me, I need hardly say, does not consist in the number of subjects acquired, it is—if I may say so—the want of growth of the mind and character from the possession of truth which a wide knowledge presents under various aspects. I am going to make use of very inadequate words, but I have not time to improve upon them: What is it that enlarges the character and mind in study? What is it that co-ordinates the lessons that have been learned and serves to give them an object, the link, in short, the reason for them? In one sense, it is a philosophy; in another sense, a wider one, it is a *passion.* But what passion should animate a religious? That of faith, of love, of a realization of the law of Jesus Christ. Diverse as they are in their unity, these have characterized all the great Orders: Love that of St Francis; faith that of St Dominic, and so forth. They have such a philosophy; for notice that the greater number of the great Orders

have taken this point of departure—their knowledge—from what I have called in one sense a passion, in another a philosophy. St Francis of Assisi said to his brethren, 'Instead of searching to find if there is a God, make acts of love of His existence.' To me that word is the principle of St Bonaventure's philosophy and of the whole Order. A Dominican studies in order to discover the truth, to co-ordinate and defend it: faith is his philosophy. . . . Would it be too rash and arrogant an undertaking to try to uplift every soul God sends us, to bring it up in the highest possible manner in the sphere of love and intelligence, in order to make it dependent on God alone; leaving it free to go to Him, and using authority only to prevent it from falling back into the lower world, into mundane views and to the pursuit of earthly ambitions? But to what has my argument led me? What I wished to say was that I am convinced Catholics will only attain to that superiority which is necessary in order to triumph, by a superiority of character imprinted in teachers and pupils by the aid of a passion which should animate them and a philosophy which should guide their footsteps. Yet this is precisely what is imprudently destroyed in religious education, so that the lay education which in the natural order possesses these three forces may have an intellectual advantage over the education which tends to destroy them: it would have on the contrary an obvious inferiority to the one which possessed those three forces in the divine order.

"I am not sure if I make my meaning clear; but what I wish to say is that a character ruled and governed according to merely human ideas of what is honourable is worth more than one which is broken down and decrepit. . . . But how great would be the superiority were these three elements of life to take their being from the source of life, not from the broken cisterns of which the prophet speaks; if characters

were imbued with the power of the Gospel; if souls were set on fire with zeal for God's truth, and with the desire that His kingdom should come; if the wisdom revealed by the Son of God Himself, and the knowledge of all united to Him, became the philosophy, the principle, the end of all education? And yet nobody seems to trouble their heads about these things. The bishops have begun to think of making their priests take their degrees; but that again will only be human learning under a sacerdotal garb. May God send us someone who grasps the importance of secular knowledge and of a Christian education, uniting one with the other and supporting one by means of the other. You will say, 'I am not that man.'

"The commencement of a foundation; the care of the members who will join it; even the material preoccupations on which its existence will depend, and the struggle with obstacles—all these things will absorb the time and attention which might in the case of men of genius be better bestowed. When we have formed the nucleus, God will put them there, He will make them advance on the path which, perchance, we have been given the mission as humble pioneers to prepare for them. I do not know of any thought more fitted than this one to encourage a sincere love of God and His Church. I think at this moment a very learned man is less wanted than one who has the power of inducing others to study, and above all of giving a lead in the manner I have pointed out. The only deadly thing would be a mysticism which would weaken souls. You should be on your guard against this. . . . Apart from this, you have advantages of age, position, fortune, experience, such as are seldom united in one person. It is for you to deliberate before God if this secret attraction which so far has not reached its full development, this interior reproach that so far you have done nothing, does not tell you that God has given them to you for *His work*.

I say for His work, for in my opinion it is at the present time a work which is more important than any other for His glory and the good of His Church. If you find yourself led by God in this direction, you must let me unite myself with it by communions, prayer and mortifications. Oh how I wish I were a saint in order to sustain you ! With what fervour I shall offer up the sacrifices which I make with less generosity than I should do, for this intention. Knowing, as you do well, how in our foundation, everything is strictly prescribed for us, it is unnecessary for me to say that for men as well as for us, I should see in religious restraints, and in discipline which would be austere without injuring health, a necessary safeguard for souls who whilst given the use of their wings, should not be allowed to fall back on the earth."

This letter, showing, as it does, traces of having been thrown off, as it were, at white heat, gives us as much as any of Mother Marie Eugénie's that have been preserved, an index of her character. Her zeal for souls, her courage, which would rather lead her to attempt the impossible either for herself or others if she felt God was calling, are reflected in it as in a mirror. Some may possibly demur to the vigour of her expressions. But it must be remembered that liberty of education, and of an education on Catholic lines which would compete in thoroughness and efficiency with secular schools and colleges, was the crying need of her time. And has it ceased to be so in her country or in this ? How often are we reminded when discussing this all important subject of our Lord's words : " The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." That Mother Marie Eugénie's hopes and aspirations were no Utopian dream is proved by the fact that five years later the efforts of so many good and great men were crowned with success. The Loi Falloux, passed in 1851, gave Catholic France all she could hope for.

The sequel of the liberty gained by that law was such as might have been anticipated; two hundred and fifty-seven free schools sprang up in the two years which succeeded it, and the development of Catholic teaching Orders dates from that time.

CHAPTER XII

"Nous sommes plus riches en Dieu que pauvres de nous-mêmes."
VEN: M. DE SALES CHAPPUIS.

MOTHER MARIE EUGENIE remarks in the letter in which she announces her speedy return to her daughters: "I have not seen so much as a wall of Nîmes. I am very pleased to be shut up here with our Lord. I can only see the Assumption, its present and its future, because after all it is the corner of the Church in which God has fixed my labours." She reached Paris early in November, accompanied by an aspirant for the community whom M. d'Alzon had found for her, and a child of thirteen whose parents were sending her to the Impasse des vignes to be educated. Later on the latter entered the novitiate.

The end of the year 1844 was signalized by the solemn profession of the first Mothers of the Assumption. Three years previously they had pronounced their vows, but on that occasion the vows were only temporary; the Congregation not being sufficiently established for the ecclesiastical authorities to sanction the taking of permanent vows by its members. Christmas Day was chosen for the great event. M. d'Alzon, who perhaps more than anyone else entered into the feelings of the holy superior on this occasion wrote to her as follows (the letter is dated 20th December 1844): "I bless God from the bottom of my heart for all that He has done for your work. The four first foundation-stones of it will be laid on the crib of the Infant Jesus. I am going during all these days to ask the adorable Child to take you and to make you grow with Him. I shall ask His Mother to place Him in your heart as in a cradle; and when He is there,

look well at Him to see what He loves best. It is what He Himself is—an infant. You will become wholly child-like for love of Him, and you will be poor also, like the infant Jesus in His crib. Oh my daughter, what great things I forsee for you on that memorable day! I shall say a Mass for your intention at seven in the morning. I shall say the Midnight Mass at the Carmelites, and as they will give me their Communions, I shall receive them in order to give them to you. If you wish to share these little gifts with your Sisters you are at liberty to do so. I look to you in the first place, and I shall pray particularly for you, but it will not displease you that I should think of your Sisters also whose work is so dear to me. Adieu my child; you can hardly believe with what liberty and joy of heart I accept the responsibility of your soul to the extent that God wishes you should be mine for Him. I shall be with you in your solitude, and I shall confide to my good Angel the charge of helping yours to keep you in the practice of recollection, prayer and mortification."

We have some memoranda of Mother Marie Eugénie's, which show the spirit in which she prepared for this retreat, as well as notes of meditations made by her during its progress. "In the days preceding the retreat," she writes, "I was strongly drawn in prayer: (1) to the thought that God wishes me to withdraw from earthly preoccupations, especially from such as are artificial. (2) To the thought of the prayer Jesus Christ made for me during His sufferings. In order to cover my utter unworthiness, which always seems to me to oppose a total barrier to His designs, I was drawn to keep the prayer of Jesus Christ ever before my eyes. '*Meditatio cordis ejus in conspectu meo semper*,' especially in His crucified state when He was reduced to such extreme agony in order to obtain my salvation. (3) I saw that in exchange for all His blood I should at least give Him all my thoughts, and

all the actions of my life, and that I should do this with the greatest earnestness. And as long as I am not held back by anything human or earthly, and even when empty of all good I tend always towards God—Jesus Christ will do all the rest, and will communicate to me the generosity which I require to share later in His sufferings. (4) That Jesus can only bring me as a portion what He had Himself: not sweetness, and lights, such as give me so much pleasure, but one of His silences of self-abjection; of childhood; of submission at Nazareth; of care only to say words dictated by His Father in His apostolic life: His patience on the Cross, and death in the sepulchre.

"I thought I should have to enter these things like a guilty person who had been pardoned, and not like an innocent invited guest; like a beggar who returns to the charge, who waits a long time at all the doors, but who yet will be admitted if he perseveres in confidence and fidelity. I must make myself passive with Jesus Christ, knowing that He is the all-powerful sanctifier of souls, only expecting virtue through His action, silencing my activity even in the pursuit of virtue and making a penance of keeping myself empty in expectation of Him, even when He does not allow me to feel His coming."

We find the following reflections in her first meditation on the end of man. "God has created me in order to manifest some of His perfections. His Son has destined me graces so that I might be able to reproduce the glory He gave His Father in the various stages of His life. At this moment I am a religious in His place: that is a host of propitiation, reverence and love of God; as a superior I am a host of service to others and of charity towards them. I feel that the moment has come for me to enter seriously into God's designs and to banish all earthly interests in order to tend unceasingly and with earnestness towards

the end for which God has given me being, and Jesus Christ grace.

"I expect this new grace from Him only, and I ask it of Him kissing His feet like Magdalen, in order to be admitted like her into the state of grace and love, and offering Him His own love and His desire for my sanctification. I found these words in the Gospel: 'In the world you shall have distress, but take confidence, I have overcome the world.' I have wept heartily at His feet for the futility of my past life, all thrown away as regards His admirable designs for it.

"At night, while making the Stations of the Cross, I asked of God the operative effect of all these mysteries: that of death in the first Station; of an entire stripping of all possessions in the tenth; of an entire dependence without making the smallest resistance or effort to attain ease by detaching my arms from the Cross, or in not allowing them to be fastened to it; and finally the most complete denudation, or burial as regards friends and all the things of this world, so that I may neither see nor know anything, nor talk nor allow myself to be known or loved: this was what was principally asked of me."

The approach of Christmas, and the fact that on that day so dear to the Christian heart, she was about to pronounce vows which would irrevocably bind her to the service of her God, gives especial interest to her meditation on Bethlehem.

"I was powerfully moved to unite myself with what must have been the principal thought and feelings of the divine Infant, that is of His love for His Mother and of His love for His Father. I have difficulty in putting into words what I felt on this subject; it was as if God had taken the scales from my eyes, and given me a fresh power of loving. The love of the Infant Jesus for His Mother struck me as being so tender, so confiding. I saw Him turning towards her with such complacency and sweetness: his child's

heart saluting her a hundred times a day with the words: 'Ave Maria,' 'Sancta Maria Mater.' And I was made to understand that to enter into all the feelings of my Spouse, I should do the same with love and confidence. His feeling of love for His Father struck me again in an entirely new light. I saw the Infant Jesus laid upon the straw, wrapt in deep silence, His heart exulting with love because His God is unceasingly present to Him—more present than the air He breathes, than the crib which sustains Him, than His being, and the depths of that being. I understood then that the sense of the continual presence of God, of which I make too often only a source of fear, is a gift greater than all extraordinary gifts.

"God—that is to say, all that I desire—God is my clothing, my society, the inmost guest of my being. Is it possible that I can pay attention to places, to things, can be otherwise occupied than in exulting with joy at being clothed upon by God! The child Jesus was there because of this God; He suffered for Him, and could say to Him: 'It is for Thee that I am a child; for Thee that I suffer cold; that I am immolated to a life of penance; that I am signed with the sign of a victim.' Thus I can say that it is for Thee that I have adopted the religious state, in the same way as it was for Thee that Jesus was an infant. That permission, that truth, was to me great beyond words. Oh what is it that one would be unable to endure when one could say to God: 'It is for Thee.'

"This presence, this companionship, this intimacy with God is a greater grace than the special graces granted to the greatest of saints. O my soul, of whom have you need to be jealous? Are any one of their graces equal to the continual presence of God, clothing and sustaining the body and the soul so truly, that if our eyes were opened we should not be able to endure its splendour? Or again in holy Communion, when the divine Infant Jesus comes into our hearts to become

the author of a pure homage offered to the Divine Majesty ?

" This thought has led me to try and forget the place I am living in, in order to see the things and persons who surround me lovingly submerged in the presence of God. A great feeling of confidence has resulted from this, and I have taken these words : ' *Ego dedi te hodie in civitatem munitam* ' as addressed to me. God arms me with Himself for the fight of penance like the Infant Jesus ; for this love has not been given to me in order that I may not suffer ; but that I should suffer with an exulting love, without fear, and without the terrible weight of justice which has often sadly oppressed me."

This is what we find written after a meditation on the hidden life at Nazareth.

" I had difficulty this morning in recollecting myself. I could only do so by the thought of trying to reproduce the life of Jesus when He was—humanly speaking—my age at Nazareth, this especially with regard to the kind of silence He kept there. This silence has appeared to me the last few days under the form of submission. Thus the only thing that was said of Him was : ' that He was subject,' and I have here the office of governing. But it is exactly from that point of view that this mystery applies to me. (1) Jesus ruled those on whom He depended, and not only Mary and Joseph, but all those who approached Him, He guided, supported and led to God ; and amongst the inhabitants of Nazareth there must have been a variety of characters—souls wanting in fidelity to grace, and Jesus in silence, in condescension to their weakness, in patience, by good example, drew them to the accomplishment of His Father's laws. Then He supported them in their dependence on Him ; a marvellous lesson for me who desire to depend, to submit, and yet not to be wanting in what is required of me in the guidance of souls.

"Secondly Jesus raises all the actions which have to do with common life to the divine plane. He performs the most ordinary things in a divine manner, and He puts the grace into these things for me who should live apart from my human life in proportion to my renunciation of them, raising them up (however much it may cost me) to the supernatural life, and to the divine will and intention.

"Thirdly, at Nazareth there are neither the lights of Thabor nor the sufferings of Calvary; but there is the total self-abandonment which leads, by the help of grace, to bearing well the Cross when it comes. Jesus works; He is brought into relationship with people; He loves Mary and Joseph, but His conduct is always ruled by the gravity of divine realities—the existence of God; of sin; of the reconciliation of man; of justice; of Providence; of the Omnipresence of God; the thought of all which should keep me silent and grave. He is ignored; and I should be hidden and lead a retired life, and make myself ignored as much as possible. He belongs utterly to His Father, to Mary and to Joseph. He is all love. He foresees the laws of His Church, the Rules and discipline of all communities. He prepares grace and direction for them; I should associate myself with His Spirit for the work I have to perform in those respects."

Mother Mary Eugénie seldom failed to make daily the Stations of the Cross. It was one of the chief devotions of her life; and even when she had reached an advanced age she still continued, with the help of one of her daughters, to follow wearily and with much pain her Saviour's steps to Calvary.

"I made the way of the Cross to-day" (she notes) "following in the steps of Magdalen. How I love this great Saint! How easy I find it to unite myself with her; and this union seems to put me in the legitimate relations of self-abasement and love towards the Blessed Virgin—who is the more calm by

the side of Jesus suffering because she is the more pure. I, as a sinner, weep with Magdalen; I grieve bitterly at seeing my Saviour thus treated for my sake; I cannot conceive how earth can bear me up, or creatures endure me when I go forth after contemplating my Jesus humbled with a proud heart. Henceforth I will only take with me my Master's dispositions. I will inebriate myself with the love of the Cross, and will share His humiliations which are beyond the comprehension of human wisdom. I have adored the falls of Jesus, I have counted His sufferings and grieved bitterly over them. I have wept also at not having yet turned to a new life. I have learned before the Cross and the sepulchre the meaning of that spirit of widowhood that the Church attributes to the religious state."

Again she writes elsewhere:

"It appears to me that God asks only one virtue of me, which is love. I must have recourse to the gravity and silence of love only, in order that my instinct of activity may become purified or laid to rest. I desire to belong to the state of love, to the order of crucified souls—such as was formed in Magdalen at the foot of the Cross. I must make Jesus Christ master, and He will not fail to do this. Let my present cross be only to do what Jesus would do in my place; to mortify my thoughts, my activities, my relations with creatures. . . . Teach me, my Saviour, how to forget myself; to annihilate myself; no longer to make any account of myself; to obey Thee implicitly, continually, without reflection, delay, or resistance, with the utter subjection of Thy sacred Humanity to the Word. Teach me what it is for me to give Thee my actions and to enter into Thine, doing nothing except by Thee. Teach me how to bear this union with Thee in modesty, peace, regularity; with interior attention, so as to consult and imitate Thee in all things, and so as to bear afterwards the shame of feeling how little real

resemblance I have to Thee ; humbling myself before those who see Thee in me, and even more before those who do not do so. Teach me, finally, what that love of all abjection is which should take such a great place in my heart, since in undertaking to imitate Thy spotless humanity I can only bring Thee an instrument which is defiled in its origin ; and this impurity, which is part of my very nature, should give me a constant contempt of all my actions and feelings. May this shame humble me before all my superiors, and before all creatures. I desire the grace to become penetrated with this thought and to make it the constant object of my reflections."

These notes end with the following :

" The thought which has principally occupied me this morning is the love of that beauty ever ancient and ever new ; and of confidence that I am called to possess it some day ; that faith, the Sacraments, my vocation, sufferings, difficulties, good desires, all the circumstances of my life, people and creatures, have only been given to me in order to lead me to it : hence a feeling of peace surmounting sufferings and death : '*Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*' ; of abandonment to God in all the things of this passing life ; a desire to serve Him by a perfect regularity, modesty, prayer and silence."

The holy superior concludes her retreat by an all-embracing prayer, in which she recommends to God not only her own soul with all its needs and aspirations but those of her daughters, and of the Church, of its Head and its ministers. She prays also for the repose of her mother's soul, for the conversion and salvation of her father, brother, and uncle ; for the priests who have directed her, and for M. Combalot—asking his forgiveness, and forgiving him for the pain they may have mutually given one another ; and for M. d'Alzon and the success of his work for souls.

Christmas Eve was spent in prayer, and on the

Feast, five members of the community, namely Mother Marie Eugénie, Sisters Thérèse Emmanuel, Marie Augustine, Marie Thérèse and Marie Catherine (lay sister) pronounced their solemn vows. To the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience they added a fourth, that of consecrating their lives to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in souls. Later on when the Holy See gave its approbation to the Rule of the Assumption, the fourth vow was suppressed—the reason being given that the three vows of religion included likewise the additional one.

M. d'Alzon, though prevented by his duties at Nîmes from assisting at the ceremony, which was performed by M. Gaume, was present at it in spirit. He writes as follows to Mother Marie Eugénie on the subject of the great day:

"So you are now altogether a religious, and for ever—'*in aeternum*.' There is something sacerdotal in the immutability of your state of life, and I am quite sure you have made your vows in such a manner as to unite you yet more intimately with the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ. May God, my daughter, give you the utmost degree of courage in order that—a religious for ever—yours should be a perpetual sacrifice, and the union of your soul with God eternal. How is it possible—I wish you would tell me?—how, having been raised so high by Faith, and by those mysterious links of love which bind us to God, we can fall so profoundly into our nothingness, into the miseries of our nature and the revolt of our sins.

"Like you I should have much wished to have been with you, and to have heard your first impressions after you were professed; but what you have written still bears the marks of it so strongly as to make me realise what it is you have given our Lord, and the manner in which you gave it to Him." M. d'Alzon, alluding to remarks in the holy superior's letter in which she had accused him of too great leniency, goes on to say:

"Why should I not help you to find a consolation which is in the order of God's providence? For the joy which comes from having consecrated oneself to His service, must, I consider, come wholly from Him. I even think that it may be the most advantageous thing for you to make this state of entire abandonment last as long as possible—one in which you have nothing to say except that you belong altogether to God. Oh that I could contribute to the increase in your soul of that '*juge convivium*' of which the Holy Ghost speaks. Trials will come soon enough, and have you not already some threatenings of them?"

We find Mother Marie Eugénie urging M. d'Alzon early in the year 1845 to come to Paris as to the place where he is most likely to find vocations; for the scheme of founding a Congregation of priests on the same lines as that of the Assumption, and which would bear the same name, was beginning to materialise.

"You speak of all the vocations which I shall find in Paris," he writes on 23rd February, "for an Order such as you dream of; but once more, have *I* what is required for it? My way of doing, of going on, proves to me on the one hand that I have not the good luck to please everybody; on the other hand I perceive very strongly that when it comes to a question of sanctity, I have absolutely nothing in me which approaches to that of founders of religious Orders. What a severe training they imposed upon themselves before attempting the task of forming others to the religious life! Be careful, also, my child, lest what has suited you better in my way of thinking than that of others may not have come from a vagueness which was less opposed to your views than what has displeased you in their more fully-developed system." A letter from M. d'Alzon, dated the 13th of March 1845, gives his penitent the permissions which she asks of him for Lenten penances, as well as advice how to spend the holy season.

M. d'Alzon having concluded the affairs which had occupied him at Nîmes for the time being, reached Paris in the beginning of April of the same year. He remained there for five months, and as he took up his abode with his old friend Bailly at the hotel Clermont-Tonnerre, he was within easy distance of the Assumption convent. This is his own account, taken from his memoirs, in which he gives the history of the origin of the Assumptionist Order for priests.

"In the year 1845 I went to Paris; and it was there that the serious consideration of plans relative to the Order properly speaking began; also I had frequent interviews with the superior of the Assumption, whose ardent desire it was that I should come to her aid, and to see a work formed for men analogous to hers for women, growing up side by side with it. From the 20th of April to the early days of September of the same year I went nearly every day to say Mass at the Convent of the Assumption, situated at that time in the Impasse des Vignes. After Mass I spent some time with the superior, either in preparing the rules of the third Order, or in re-reading the Constitutions of the nuns, or in discussing what should be done with regard to an Order founded for men. We discussed and arranged about many things. The Sisters at that time were few in number; some novices, however, began to come in, and already one seemed to foresee the blessing of God in the choice made of them."

Mother Marie Eugénie never ceased recommending this work, which, as we have already seen, she had so deeply at heart, to God's protection. In a letter written the day after she pronounced her perpetual vows, she wrote to M. d'Alzon: "There was nothing I prayed for more fervently when stretched under the pall than your sanctification in the work which I am urging you to undertake." And on another occasion, when announcing to him the profession of some of her daughters, she adds: "I forgot to tell you that

the sisters who have just been professed have asked as a special grace for the sanctification and success of your work, as Father of the two Congregations."

In some notes communicated to the superior of the Assumption after M. d'Alzon's death, allusion is made to the unanimity which existed between him and Mother Marie Eugénie on the work of education and kindred subjects. "These two elect souls, touched by the same grace, and urged by a similar inspiration from God, met on the common ground of what was the leading preoccupation with both one and the other: the regeneration of society by means of putting a new spirit into the education of men and women. The interviews they had in which they found fresh sympathy in their exchange of ideas and aspirations confirmed them in this thought. The sequel of this history will show how these providential links became ever closer, from the first day on which they existed. These few words will, it appeared to us, be sufficient to establish the fact that the Father of so many good works and the Mother of the nuns of the Assumption were inspired by a similar grace and attraction; they will show how they helped each other, what special part was played by one and the other, and above all how we, following their example, should bring all back to the sole Author of all good: *Meus*, *tuus*, *noster*, *imo Christi*." [1]

The humility which was characteristic of both—as it is that of all holy souls—caused each to attribute to the other the leading part in these good works. The Abbé (or rather Fr. d'Alzon, as he will henceforth have a right to be called) told the nuns of the Assumption on one occasion: "It is owing to your Mother that I founded the Order of Assumption for men." Mother Marie Eugénie on the other hand, when she heard of the death of Fr. d'Alzon, wrote to

[1] *Origines de l'Assomption t.* 2, p. 313.

Mgr Besson : " He was our Founder ; his death leaves us orphans."

To return to 1845, we find that the holy superior wrote in the month of May of that year to her director asking him to allow her to make a vow of obedience to him. This was his answer : " It is repugnant to my feelings to accept a vow of obedience from a nun. It seems to me it would be taking something from a person which she no longer possessed." Notwithstanding this objection, we are told that he was touched by this mark of confidence ; and he goes on to say : " What shall I give you in exchange ? I can only promise God to devote myself more than ever to the work of perfection in your soul."

In a letter dated 29th May, Mother Marie Eugénie puts in precise terms the meaning of the vow she wishes to make.

" It appears to me that the will of God in the obedience which I have vowed to you, is that the relations between us should be : (1) A relationship of *dependence* on my side : in the present state of things I depend on no one, and I have to avoid doing so, in order to preserve the greatest possible amount of freedom for the work. It seems to me that God wishes me to make up for that, in causing me to submit to a rigid dependence in all that is personal in the exercise of this freedom, to the extent of making me feel that however much latitude I have with regard to the community, I should not be able to do, or wish for, the smallest thing without your permission and by your will. This permission should be refused me, or deferred even in legitimate matters with the sole object of making me practise submission ; and orders should be given me the only object of which would be to make me feel that I am not my own mistress. (2) A relationship of *humility*. In the position I hold there is very little opportunity given

me of being called to account, of submitting to the authority of my confessor or of my superior. Who therefore is in a position to destroy this interior pride unless you do so? God asks me to lend myself to it and to give me a thirst for it under your guidance. Again I am much drawn to wish that things should come about in accordance with my judgment; and though God does not ask me to submit my ideas to you, I feel strongly that He asks me to obey you without judging—to believe that you know best what is best for me, better than I know myself, and this also is a practice of humility such as I can only find in your direction. (3) A relationship of *sacrifice*. Just as God invites me to renounce a purely natural life to the same extent I find myself, unfortunately, imperceptibly gliding back into it. I require that someone should close the road for me, should dispose of me in all ways: in work, in repose, in my relations with the world, with my family, so that I should have no feeling of proprietorship in any of those things. It is necessary that those limits which I am often tempted to put to mortifications, of an interior kind, or of an exterior should be broken down from time to time by obedience, beyond the very narrow measure which my natural prudence or my cowardice assigns to them. It is by this means that I am maintained in a continual spirit of self-sacrifice; because it suffices that I am forced to conquer my inclination in one thing which I feel deeply, for me to feel myself stripped of all the others, and obliged to hold myself in readiness to sacrifice them all. I have a sincere desire to be always in that state; accordingly nothing helps me more than trials, which being renewed from time to time never allow me to establish securely the ground of my repugnances or my self-will. No doubt the impression which I constantly have in prayer corresponds with this; namely that the immolation which God asks of me should be exercised by obedience. The part I am

especially called upon to play is to give myself up; to say simply what I feel before God in the manner in which obedience disposes of me; and then to obey and allow myself to be immolated. (4) A relationship of *faith*. Another thing Jesus Christ wishes is that I should take all that you could ask of me cheerfully, and with joy, as His personal will. You do not represent the general government of Providence in my regard, but our Lord's particular government of me; the will of His good pleasure; what pleases Him at a particular moment; the dispositions He asks of me; the practices He desires; and He lets me know through you the very moment in which He asks for them. This thought I feel, is one which will make my soul pliant, and will inspire me with joy in all that I do with and for you out of obedience.

"You know, for I have often told you, that you must never hesitate to make me submit, however much it may cost me to do so. I am always able to obey. God has also asked me, as you are aware, to be ready to give an account of my conduct to the first person whom it may appear advisable to you to send to me in order to command, reprehend, or correct me. And it seems to me that if you judged advisable to do so, though this would be rather a serious act of disapprobation and humiliation, that I should by God's grace submit to such an one as obediently as I should to you.

"On these conditions I do not feel that God in any way reproaches me with the candid liberty which I preserve towards you, nor the frankness with which I give you my advice, nor the independence of my opinions on all general subjects."

This manifestation of a soul drawn to a close union with God cannot fail to interest those who are attracted to the study of the manifold dealings of God with man. It is truly a human document in the highest sense of the word, showing as it does the

heights of self-renunciation which God asks of His chosen servants. For could there be a greater test of humility and soul-stripping than that to which Mother Marie Eugénie was prepared—God helping—to submit ? and as we shall see later on, she never faltered in the course she had marked out for herself, namely that of entire submission to her director in matters spiritual, and absolute straightforwardness and freedom of speech in other, and secular, affairs.

The result of this exchange of letters (as we learn from the writer of the "Origines") was that Fr. d'Alzon ceased to protest, and, in response to the vow made by Mother Marie Eugénie, promised that he would devote himself ever more earnestly to the work of bringing her soul to the perfection God asked of her ; and helping her to the full extent of his power in the cares of her Congregation. And because there is a flux and reflux of grace between those two minds he also was seized with an earnest desire to bind himself to God with closer ties. He aspired to the ties of a religious life ; and whilst awaiting the moment when he could pronounce his vows as head of his Congregation, he repaired to Notre-Dame des Victoires, and at the altar of that church consecrated himself to God by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—promising also to devote himself more than ever to the salvation of souls. The formula of this vow was found amongst Mother Marie Eugénie's papers in the handwriting of Fr. d'Alzon.

Sister Marie Thérèse relates that on the very day he pronounced these vows he was coming out of the church, having made his thanksgiving, and, as it was raining hard, he took a carriage, proceeding afterwards to the Assumption convent. But no sooner had he got into the carriage than he remembered his vow of poverty : the first person he met on his arrival at the Impasse des vignes was Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, to whom he confided his scruple. The latter's answer

was a consoling one : She told him that it would have been more opposed to his vow if he had ruined his cassock ! We have another reminiscence of Fr. d'Alzon's at this time which has been preserved for us in the annals of the Assumption. He had given the community a retreat and at his departure each member of it presented him with a little picture. The words written by Sister Thérèse Emmanuel on hers were taken from the Scriptures : *Congregate illi sanctos qui ordinant testamentum ejus super sacrificia.*

" Where did you find that text ? " Fr. d'Alzon asked with a surprised voice.

" In the psalms, M. l'Abbé."

" But what made you think of it ? "

" Because it was what you will do."

The impression made on Fr. d'Alzon by these words was strong—as he recalled many years later. For he had precisely at that time made up his mind to found his Order.

Allusion has been made more than once, in the course of this sketch of the life of the foundress of the Assumption, to the supernatural gifts of Sister Thérèse Emmanuel. As early as the year 1843 Mother Marie Eugénie wrote as follows to her director on this subject : " Sister Thérèse Emmanuel has states of recollection in prayer which resemble either rapture or ecstasy so strongly that I have felt myself obliged to speak about it to our superiors."

In truth the sacrifices asked of this holy soul and the graces given her were becoming every day more apparent. " Mother Marie Eugénie guided her with a solicitude which was marked with equal wisdom and discretion ; she studied the best authorised writers on asceticism, precipitated nothing ; showed no astonishment, only asking for proofs. Whilst asking for light by means of much prayer, she made use with great prudence of the rules for the discernment of spirits ;

examined whether what she was called upon to judge was comformable with the Scriptures and the teachings of the saints, and without deciding anything based her direction on those words of our Lord which gave support to what God appeared to ask of His servant."

Mother Marie Eugénie wrote as follows about the mistress of novices during the Lent of 1844 :

"At the beginning of Lent Sister Thérèse Emmanuel told me that what our Lord demanded of her seemed so impossible for her to obey, that she could not help saying to Him: 'But Lord, Thou wouldst have me then walk upon air? I cannot find anything on which to rest. It is as if I should step out of the window of the first floor.' Our Lord answered her, 'You will not trust my word, you do not wish to abandon yourself to a power beyond that of human reasoning? Well, during this Lent you shall live without food, and you will see if I am not able to support you.'

"Accordingly when Lent arrived it was impossible to make her take any solid food, for she instantly vomited it, and in order to save her great suffering I was obliged to make up my mind to giving her a cup of tea, only, towards evening, and sometimes a little of the inside of a cooked apple. This was all the nourishment she was able to keep down during those forty days. My anxiety about her was, naturally, considerable ; and I made the doctor come from time to time to examine the state of her health. Dr Gouraud never found her pulse weakened ; and she continued to lead the common life, getting up at five in the morning like the other Sisters, walking, teaching, reciting the Office in choir, and all the rest, during the whole of the forty days. At Easter she had some days of severe physical sufferings, and then she resumed the ordinary diet of the community."

The following are some notes jotted down by

Sister Thérèse Emmanuel in the month of March of the same year :

" My soul and my body are nourished at Communion, as at a real banquet, on Jesus Christ. I feel myself bodily fortified, and this penetrates me with love, and makes me realise the extent to which my physical life belongs to Jesus since He nourishes me with Himself. . . . During the day I saw a doctor. Jesus said that the state I was in came from Him and that there was nothing to change in it. It was as if, instead of recalling me to the natural life, He was leading me to a life which was more and more supernatural without heed to human wisdom.

" 2nd March. However much I try I cannot take food. Jesus wills that I should be nourished on Him. I often feel a kind of renovation of bodily strength in the course of the day—almost as if balm and oil had penetrated my being so that my physical forces were entirely restored."

Obedience is the sure touch-stone of the supernatural life. Where this and humility are wanting, there can be no security that the soul is not the victim of delusion, even when to all appearance she is favoured with great and startling spiritual favours. We learn what Sister Thérèse Emmanuel thought of the cardinal virtue of obedience from some notes made by her in the April of this year. Our Lord deigned to teach her Himself in prayer, reiterating what He had told her before that it was His will that she should unite herself to Him under the guise of victim. He made her understand that there are two ways in which He makes Himself known to us : one in the form of light, which He impresses on our intellect ; and the other by that of experience, which suffering impresses on the whole being. " Jesus taught me that the grace of inward crucifixion unites the soul more to Him than the grace of light, because the soul in the grace of crucifixion is called as well as Jesus Christ, in due measure and pro-

portion, to sacrifice itself. She can become crucified in as high a degree for her, as Jesus Christ was for Himself, and this causes a very close union with Him. . . . If Jesus Christ lived now upon earth, and began again the life He led there, He would have the same purposes for humanity that He had then with regard to the soul to whom He united Himself. He is not again made flesh, but He unites Himself to my soul by the union of divine grace, and He wills to exercise over it all the rights and the powers which He exercised over the sacred humanity whilst on earth. My soul, realising that it is caught up in this divine plan, is ever disengaging itself more and more from other influences in order to surrender itself to this one."

In those brief moments in which God speaks to His servants, allowing them, as He does in ecstasy, a glimpse of His surpassing attraction, they are ready to believe all that He says to them. They ask for no proof that it is in very truth He who is speaking. But the vision fades, they come to earth. And as in tropical climates directly the sun goes down it is succeeded by blackest night, and with the darkness come forth noisome creatures who did not dare to show themselves by the blessed light of day, so it is with the human soul. The soul is attacked by its enemies, is jeered at by phantoms of the imagination, and only the grace of God can sustain it through its trials.

Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, however, had long realised that the great source of grace in religious life is obedience. She had recourse to her superior, who put her doubt to rest, assuring her that the lights that came to her in prayer bore every mark of coming to her from her crucified Saviour. She wrote on 28th April 1845 : " Jesus came to my soul with great joy, filling me with His presence lovingly, as if He was assured of no interruption, and teaching me that He gained by the obedience my superior gave me because His will is manifested through our Mother. She has

strengthened my bonds, whereas if I had not sought for strength in obedience I should have had nothing but my own will to support me and my will not being God's humble servant would have driven me further from the impressions which united me to Him as soon as the temptation to incredulity came. This brought me a great esteem for obedience while I was being led by those ways. While in ecstasy the will of Jesus moulds me, as it were, and dominates my will, but out of it there are two wills in me which have to regulate my free correspondence with grace and my fidelity: my own will and that of my superior or a confessor. The latter is not only similar to that of God, but His will itself as expressed in my regard. The other is human, modified or excited according to my attractions, repugnances or temptations. God governs me Himself whilst I am in ecstasy, out of it He governs me through my superior. The will of God leads me at all times, and our Mother's leading is one with His. I understood from this how worthless my will is from the point of view of fidelity, and how little good God gains from it. He cannot count upon it; at times it co-operates with Him, and at others—because it is in its essence changeable, uncertain, turned away from Him—it opposes obstacles to Him.

"Adopting this view I found myself subjected to God's power without any limit but His will, no longer able to regulate aught by my own will, which at last was submissive and united to His."

On the eve of the Ascension, a few days later, it was revealed to her by her divine Spouse that He desired she should follow Him in ascending to heaven. He would lead her captive with the chains of love; earth and earthly thoughts would no longer exist for her: soon she would have Him alone for all riches and for all love. Whilst at Mass on the Feast of the Ascension the following day, our Lord revealed to her the mystery of the Ascension in the Blessed Sacrament.

"Jesus is there present in the Host as He is in His Ascension where, risen to heaven, hidden from the sight of men, at the right hand of His Father, He pleads for man with His wounds and confers favours upon them. Jesus hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, but visible also, is there as a perpetual sacrifice; as Adorer of His Father, and as an offering and host of propitiation for men. . . . Jesus signified to me how He is truly on earth on the altar, but living a life that is not of this earth—a life apart, one suitable to a victim only. In the same way I am on earth, but I should look upon myself as being there only as on an altar, having no traffic with the earthly life which surrounds the foot of the altar. I saw that I must become like the little Host to whose dimensions Jesus is reduced after His great immolations; that I should become filled with God, this plenitude being hidden under a vile appearance, one of no importance, to be assumed or to be dropped; given as a Host in order to communicate the virtue of God."

This thought, that she should look upon herself as sharing with the Divine Victim—the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world—His mission of interceding for sinners by suffering and union with Him pervades all the notes made by Sister Thérèse Emmanuel at this time in obedience to her superior's orders. It was accompanied by another thought: that in order to accomplish this, she should have to renounce all personal aims and exercise of her will or choice, and so "naked follow her naked Jesus."

"The will of Jesus is to take all I have so as to give it to souls," she wrote on one occasion. "He will deprive me, day after day, of something of mine, from one point of view or another in order to sacrifice me to others, and they will all be able to profit more than I do by my merits and my sufferings. I was astonished to find from this that being separated from creatures on the natural side—my heart having to

give them up and having to wish them to give me up—I came back to them from the Divine (supernatural) side, united to Jesus Christ in His Mission to mankind."

The retreat given by Fr. d'Alzon to the community in the spring of 1845 gave Sister Thérèse Emmanuel an opportunity (of which her superior urged her to avail herself) of opening her heart to that holy priest. He asked her to make a manifestation of her conscience to him, not only when in the state of rapture, but also in those moments out of it when she experienced such opposition in her inferior nature to the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

It was on one of those occasions that she wrote as follows: "Sometimes I feel in the midst of the blind submission which obliges me to do what I am told, a a kind of bitter mockery directed against myself. No incredulous person who knew what was passing in my soul could find more sarcastic things to say about me than does my reason at such times." Blind obedience to those who had authority over her was the only means of vanquishing these temptations; and that Sister Thérèse Emmanuel was successful we learn from some resolutions made after her retreat (31st May 1845), which breathe of nothing so much as of peace and submission to the Divine Will.

"I offer myself to Jesus and put myself in His hands like the bread which is put into the priest's hands for the holy Sacrifice. I wish to remain there, so as to become under the operation of His grace what He wishes me to be. I wish to put the love of Jesus crucified into practice, making choice of Him in that state and giving myself wholly to Him to be crucified. I will apply myself to the work amongst the novices, trying to be to them what Jesus was before His Passion—giving them an example in everything, and remembering what was said of Him: *Cœpit facere et docere;* also being animated in my office by zeal for souls, and being prepared to make all possible sacrifices, includ-

ing those which I should find most trying, for one soul alone, seeing in her one redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ. As regards my every-day habits, I desire to humble myself in all my intercourse with souls, treating with them as if I were their servant and their victim, making myself less than any out of great love for them in order to raise them to God."

It need not surprise us to find that Sister Thérèse Emmanuel's temptation to doubt with regard to the origin of the supernatural manifestations, though for the time laid to rest, returned at intervals ; and it was on one of these occasions that she had again recourse to Fr. d'Alzon. His answer bears the date of 21st January 1846, and runs as follows :

" I received your letter, my dear daughter, yesterday evening and I wished to say Mass for your intention before answering it, in order to find in our Saviour those lights of which I have need in order that what I say may satisfy your soul. I believe I grasp your meaning completely when you ask me for a ' Church's sanction.' Apart therefore from the question of paternal affection of which you can have no doubt, I will speak to you with all the authority you have given me over you, and which I have accepted in your regard.

" I do not know if I also may not be mistaken, my dear daughter, but nothing seems to me more simple than your state. I see two elements in you, both very distinct ; the struggle at times between one and the other producing precisely those sufferings or part of those sufferings, which you experience : for we must distinguish as regards them. It is very clear to me that God is working in you and not your imagination. If your raptures could be attributed to your personal feelings of exaltation, you would wish to cherish them ; and the repugnances which you are now experiencing appear to me to prove that that state of mind could not come from yourself, as you own that when you are seized with one of these transports you are unable to

master it, and that you are afterwards tempted to incredulity by your natural disposition to revert to the cause, and thus are turned away from accepting the practical consequences. Neither is it the devil who produces these effects, I am certain, for numberless reasons which it would be useless to enumerate. It can only therefore be God, Whose action I perceive, it seems to me, very clearly on several counts.

(1) The ecstasy takes possession of you whether you will it or not.

(2) When you are in this state you go wherever you are pushed, without your will having any say in the matter.

(3) The impressions you receive are all good and worthy of God.

(4) You distinguish in an astonishing manner between what is asked of you and what you would choose if you were acting according to nature; whence I conclude from this very fact, and from the aspects which it presents, that it is of Divine origin.

"As soon as we have ascertained that the ecstasy comes from a Divine source, the rest is easily explained.

"You must accept the trials which are sent to you; always making a distinction, as I have just said, between those which God imposes on you and those which come to you from your own faults. Those which are the result of your incredulity, of your doubts, of your cowardice in responding to what God asks of you come from yourself. Those sufferings have no merit; and, will you forgive me for telling you that they are culpable? They are like the anguish of Jonah cast into the sea for refusing to go where God willed him to go. I feel that it is my duty to show myself severe on this point, because I think it is there that you are resisting the Holy Spirit. But do all your sufferings bear this character? Evidently not. Since God draws you to

His sorrowful mysteries, it is certain that you will have to suffer and suffer grievously; but these sorrows which come from a Divine source are very meritorious if you accept them, the merit coming from God's action in His creature and her adhesion to Him.

"You will ask me now whether one of the causes of your sufferings being incredulity with regard to the impressions you receive, you should seek to banish it from your soul? Here, my dear child, I find great difficulty in answering you; for if our Lord wishes to try you by means of incredulity (which can easily be understood), you have only to adopt two lines of conduct, or rather one implying two conditions.

"The first is to establish your soul in the dispositions of losing itself unreservedly and unconditionally in the will of God by accepting whatever He pleases: offering yourself at the same time with all possible generosity to His blows, so as to be a daughter of sorrows with Jesus Christ. The second is to manifest your state with filial submission in any special circumstance to which your present state may give rise, to your spiritual Father or superior.

"If these are your dispositions, and if you are resolved to be generous in all things towards God, and to accept my decision, I shall use all my authority over you to persuade you first to accept these raptures as coming to you from God; secondly, to live in a manner conformable to these favours; thirdly, to banish, as far as it depends upon you to do so, all incredulity; fourthly, to renounce the natural life in order to assume the supernatural life to which you are called by our Saviour; fifthly, to examine yourself, to see whether even when you are in a state of anguish of mind, you are not conscious of a glimmering of peace. The latter is the only point on which you do not give me sufficiently positive information in your letter. It seems to me that there are moments in which peace must be entirely banished from your soul, and yet

notwithstanding this that you must feel that there is something in you, which is not of you, which tells you that it cannot be otherwise. If you had this impression only at the moment of ecstasy, even should it afterwards depart, it would not signify.

"This is what I would say to you, and it would be impossible for me to speak otherwise; and I hold this language with all the authority of the paternal rights you have given me over you. Be then faithful to our Lord, and do not force Him by your cowardice to chastise you in His jealousy. But I hope better things of you; and whilst helping you by my poor prayers to hold on to the Cross, the peace of mind my words will give you should encourage you to submit to be a victim, and to place yourself on the altar where I immolated you with our Lord this morning."

Sister Thérèse Emmanuel was given an opportunity, before six months elapsed, of putting into practice that entire abandonment of herself to the will of God which, as her director pointed out, was the road to perfection. The Cross took the form this time, however, not of mental but of physical sufferings. In June of the same year after great exertions to prepare for a procession on the feast of Corpus Christi, she fainted, and had to be carried to bed. The doctor was sent for and found her in high fever, and shortly afterwards scarlet fever complicated by other symptoms declared itself. For many months Sister Thérèse Emmanuel had to resign herself to an invalid existence; for the fever was followed by lung trouble, when great fears were entertained for her life. Her illness was a severe trial to the novices; Mother Marie Eugénie did her utmost to supply the place of their mistress, but nevertheless her loss was sorely felt, and by no one more than the holy superior herself. We hear her deep anxiety, notwithstanding her resignation to the Divine Will, in a cry of anguish which she breathed into Fr. d'Alzon's ear. "If I lose her," she wrote,

" if God deprives me of this help, what will become of the work ? Is it possible that I can sustain the burden alone ? . . . I can scarcely believe it." The good Father would not admit that her fears were well founded, and he consoles her by saying, " If the work comes from God, do you believe that it would come to nought even if He withdrew this support from you ? No, my dear child, and I feel sure you only tell me of these fears in order to show me not only your thoughts but the first beginnings—the germs of those thoughts. Reject them instantly, as they are of a nature to do you great injury in God's sight."

During the ten weary months in which Sister Thérèse Emmanuel was confined to her bed or to the solitude of the infirmary, though she was not allowed to see or talk to the novices, they were allowed to write to her, and she to answer their letters. To this circumstance we owe advice and thoughts on the religious life which were carefully treasured up by their recipients, and which show the deep spirituality of the training given by the Founders of the Assumption to their daughters.

To Sister Marie Louise, who had written sadly complaining of her Mistress's prolonged absence from the novitiate, she answered in words which may be read with profit by all who are aiming at perfection in the cloister.

" It is very true, my dear child, that here below we cannot have one single day's happiness which comes from natural causes and the gratification of one's own will. If it were not so, it would prove that we were made for this world, not for eternity. The trials and sufferings of this passing life are the means God makes use of to detach us, and to make us lift our hearts on high towards the eternal and sovereign good which hereafter we shall possess, and which even in this world may be ours. Believe me, instead of taking always natural happiness as our point of departure, and

grieving over the disappointments which the realities of life bring with them, we should take that of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and look upon them in the light in which He understood them. He loved what nature abhors, because He loved the expiation in them —accomplished by sacrifice. For see, dear Sister, that to us who are united by the contract of vows to our Lord, who give our lives to the same ends—the glory of God and the salvation of souls—though this doctrine may be hard from the natural point of view, yet have we not to place our happiness in what gives Him happiness, and our grief in what grieves Him, because in our quality of spouses we are bound to be one with Him ? All union with Jesus Christ is founded on self-renunciation, *Abneget semetipsum.* And the possession of Jesus is promised us in the place of those things for which nature craves. Is not this a sufficient recompense ? The saints have thought so ; and they endured much for love of Him. St Teresa says, ' the reward will be very great ; but even were there to be none the honour of being allowed to serve His Divine Majesty should suffice.' Perhaps for some time to come—you must not let this frighten you—instead of those joys and consolations which you are eager to enjoy at once, you will only have, as a rule, sufferings, trials, the weight of the Cross, the pain of sacrifice : but would you on that account desert the standard of Jesus Christ ? . . . Would you be of the number of those effeminate soldiers who know not how to face the rigours of the campaign, and who tire when victory and the booty are long in coming ? One more counsel, and that is to pay little attention to the trials which are opposed to your natural susceptibilities ; disregard them. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ, who held Himself of no account and allowed Himself to be treated accordingly. Do not ask to be better treated than He was. Encourage your poor soul ; and if she wishes for enjoyment show her the Cross,

and promise her that if she passes through the trials and sufferings of self-sacrifice, she will reap the glory. Here, dear Sister, is what I believe our Saviour wishes me to say to you. Give wings to your soul. Cut the cords which hold it down, and let it take flight to Jesus crucified by the sacrifice of all it possesses. Have patience with regard to details—with all the little nothings which you will have to retrench from your natural inclinations; return to the charge a hundred times a day, until you have acquired the habit of abiding with your Saviour in a state of sacrifice, and nature no longer draws you from it. If you are generous this will happen in a few years; and do not be alarmed at its taking time. It is but little for so great a good. Jesus will be your *way* in order to lead you to the *truth*. . . . I think I know beforehand the objections you will make, but there is not one which will hold good in the presence of Jesus Christ. Therefore we must sum up in His favour and in favour of the holy Cross."

It has been said with great truth of Sister Thérèse Emmanuel that she had "*la passion des âmes*." And could anything more beautiful, more inspiring be said of any mortal than this? "It is a thing about which there can be no doubt," she wrote on one occasion, "that God, His honour and glory, and the salvation of souls, are the only things worth struggling for on earth. . . . I am devoured with a longing to do something for God. I feel a great need in me to make Him known and loved. This is my only business here below; for this I wish to live, to think, to labour and to sacrifice myself."

If this holy soul, in the early days of the Assumption, asked an impossible perfection of her novices, and was unduly strict with them, this phase passed in time; and it can hardly be regretted that her standard was a high one in the infancy of the Congregation. For if she disheartened the poor-spirited who found it impos-

sible to live up to her high ideals, on the other hand she attracted generous souls who were ready to give to God all that He asked of them in the religious life. We have examples of severity, which in later years was changed into gentleness and indulgence, in the persons of St Bernard and St Ignatius, of whom Laucicius wrote that they were very hard and severe on those that did wrong, but after they had reached mature sanctity became very mild and most kind. The worst accusation that could be made against this saintly nun is that she asked a great deal from "men of good will," and made little account of purely natural repugnances. Accordingly we read of her that, "faithful herself to the smallest observances of her Rule," she required the same fidelity from her novices. "It is the will of God which you are doing," she used to say to them, "whatever you do therefore should be done with equal attention. My dear Sisters, the day will come when all your offices will lose the particular names they bear and will only have one: that of the will of God. You will be judged by the love with which you have accomplished this Will."

On one occasion she came across a lay Sister who was sweeping the staircase carelessly, and she at once reproved her: "Do you not understand that you must put love into your sweeping? In the house of God everything should be done through love."

She gave herself wholly and entirely to the souls of those under her charge, because the love of Jesus possessed her. Her actions, her direction of the novices, were nothing but a prolongation of prayer. When she prayed her whole being appeared to be absorbed in God. She remained daily for hours together on her knees, motionless, her head slightly bent back, her face lit up with an inward light, and eyes raised to heaven as if in intimate converse with her Spouse. Then when these heart-to-heart colloquies were concluded, she took up with minute care

the round of her exterior duties, fulfilling them down to the smallest detail. An article lost through carelessness, a duster spoiled, a door shut with violence, all these things claimed her attention ; for all these trifles of which every-day life is made up have their meaning in the moral life, because they are an exercise of will. Without ever ceasing to keep her attention fixed upon God, or rather because she never ceased looking upon Him, she saw all things transfigured in the light of her faith and her love. Our Saviour also willed to lead the same humble life, one day like another, in which there was nothing (to judge merely by what was visible to the eye) but what was ordinary and insignificant, but in which—as in the greatest events—there was the opportunity of accomplishing the Divine Will. Accordingly one thing only will survive of all the works and efforts of men if it is found in them : that is the desire they have had to fulfil the Will of God. In truth the whole of the gospels may be found there, and all the teaching and the example given us by Jesus Christ. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's soul was deeply penetrated by this thought ; and it was, so to speak, that, and nothing else, that she taught her novices.

To aim at doing God's will, to put this before us in all our efforts, in all our enterprises, in all our projects is a rule of life which presents itself to the mind with a simplicity which at the first glance is wholly attractive. For what could characterise the relations between the Creator and the creature more properly and more justly ? Nevertheless this rule, though it appears to be so simple and so clear when it is only a question of a theoretical appreciation, implies in practice, by an unavoidable consequence, continual and never-ending sacrifice. Our Saviour has said it. In order to follow Him, to do as He has done the Will of God, it is necessary to renounce oneself, to fight incessantly that ingrained instinct of humanity which inclines each one of us to centre all on self. Mother

Thérèse Emmanuel had this fundamental law of the Christian life implanted in her soul: she lived by it: by a natural consequence, therefore, it was constantly the theme of her instructions to her novices.

Mother Thérèse Emmanuel was admirably assisted by her superior in her work of forming souls to the religious life. Mother Marie Eugénie occupied herself constantly with the Sisters; she gave instructions twice a week to the novices, besides seeing each of them apart once every month. In addition she put herself at all times at the disposal of all the members of the community. Each one was free to come and "pour out," as she expressed it, "the over-flow (*trop plein*) from their hearts into mine," whatever the overflow consisted of; it might be of nothing more than distractions, theories, or possibly foibles. Mother Marie Eugénie gave much attention as well to the intellectual training of the novices. She wished that they should have what may be called clear views upon everything. She gave them, herself, what may be called outlines of history and literature which were sufficient to enable them to form general views about these subjects, in view of following them up with a more detailed knowledge of them. She wished also that the Sisters who had the time to give to such accomplishments as music, drawing, and languages, and had an aptitude for them, should cultivate their talents, for in her eyes they formed part of the education of women of the world, and consequently of those to whom was given the task of forming them. She was intent on founding an apostleship by means of education; hence she looked upon the preparation of the novices for the accomplishment of this task as being amongst the foremost of her duties.[1]

[1] *Une Fondatrice de Congregation*, pp. 270-3.

CHAPTER XIII

Our life is but a little holding, lent
To do a mighty labour . . .
. . . . . We are one
With Heaven and the stars when it is spent
To serve God's aim.

G. MEREDITH.

THE autumn of the year 1845 was marked in the history of the Assumption by two events : one was the transfer of the community from the Impasse des Vignes to Chaillot, and the other the increase of numbers both in the school and community which made the change necessary. Sister Marie Louise had entered the Congregation a year and a half before, and was therefore the first to pronounce her vows in the chapel of the new convent. She was a Bavarian by birth, and had been sent to the Assumption by M. Léon Boré, a learned professor and celebrated orientalist who was attached to the University of Munich. Her vocation was due to an incident which took place when she was little more than a child. Louise Beiling—such was her name in the world—when walking in the streets of Munich was attracted by the appearance of some young girls, and, noticing that they all carried white flowers, she followed them into a house and then into a room in which the body of a child was laid out. There was no appearance of mourning in the death chamber ; the young girl was clothed in white with a wreath of white roses on her head and there were more flowers all about her. But what struck Louise most was the look of peace on the girl's face, and the circumstance that those who surrounded her, or who came to look on, had more the appearance of doing her homage than of praying for her. Louise—puzzled at the sight—asked what it meant, was she a saint ? The answer she

received was: "I don't know, but the honours are not paid to her but to holy virginity." These words made a great impression on Louise. "Virginity," she thought to herself, "is then something very great. Well! I will also remain a virgin, and take my white robe and my bridal wreath to Heaven and belong to Jesus Christ." She went straight home to her father, and asked if she might go and be a Good Shepherd nun. She was then fifteen years of age. He told her that she was much too young to decide on her vocation and must wait till she was grown up. Three years later her father died, and her mother, after grievous heart-searchings, for Louise was the eldest of seven children and would have been invaluable to her in helping to bring up her younger brothers and sisters, consented to let her follow the call of God. M. Léon Boré, who was an intimate friend of the Beiling family, wrote to Mother Marie Eugénie in these terms to announce her arrival: "She is enchanted at the prospect of going to you, and you will have no trouble in forming her to the religious life. She will be as a frank and docile child in your hands. Yes! she is a child in the best sense of the word—a child in her simplicity as well as in her inexperience. I do not doubt that you will take great motherly joy in seeing this child of your heart develop before your eyes, as the result of your care and training of her."

These words were amply justified; and Sister Marie Louise was noticeable for her fervour and piety as well as for a charm and gaiety that endeared her to all around her.

The community received a large accession of strength in the end of the year 1845. Four postulants came from the diocese of Nîmes, who were penitents of Fr. d'Alzon. He announced their arrival to the superior in these terms:

"You may expect," he wrote in the November of that year, "the arrival of a little four-square battalion

in time for Christmas. Is it necessary for me to recommend them to you ? It would be equivalent to anyone saying to a mother, pray take care of your son ! " He ends his letter by saying " the letters you have written them were perfect. They were enchanted with them. Assuredly if joy is a mark of vocation, these children have got it and no mistake."

Only two out of the four postulants persevered, Mlle d'Erlange and Mlle Bourdet. The health of the two others broke down, and they had to return to Nîmes where one, Mlle Achard, died not long afterwards.

Two others came a little later as soon as the community had settled at Chaillot. One of these hailed from the island of Guadaloupe. Her father was dead ; but her mother, consenting to her wish to become a nun, sent her to Paris ; and by the advice of the Abbé Gaultier, she was received at the Assumption. She was only sixteen years of age, and not having completed her education, was first taken into the school and afterwards was admitted into the novitiate.

Of Sister Marie Caroline, whose name in the world was Mlle de Paty, it was said that the impression she left on the Congregation was that of an apostle. " She belonged to that small band of souls whose example alone stood with many as the voice of God calling to them. She was asked on one occasion why such a number of vocations were found amongst the children under her special charge. Did she often speak to them of the religious life ? Her answer was : " Never : I try to inspire them with the love of Jesus Christ and the love of sacrifice."

Negotiations for the purchase of the house and grounds of Chaillot began in the summer of 1845, but the community did not take possession till October. The sum asked for it was large, no less than ten thousand pounds, but Mother Marie Eugénie's confidence in Providence and the future of the Congregation was

great, and needless to say it was justified by events. She had a powerful support in business matters in her uncle, M. de Franchessin; and both he and M. d'Alzon were of the greatest service to her on this occasion, lending their countenance to the transaction financially as well as morally. The advantages of Chaillot over the Impasse des Vignes could hardly be exaggerated. The latter was situated in a quarter mainly composed of mean streets; and little calculated to attract parents belonging to the higher classes to the school, whereas the house of Chaillot was in close proximity to the Champs Elysées, and consequently in one of the most fashionable quarters of Paris. Though the house was insufficient for the double requirements of convent and school, the difficulty was solved by giving all the best rooms to the accommodation of the children: the nuns reserving the garrets and basement for their own use. The following description is given of the house by Sister Marie Thérèse, in her reminiscences of the early days of the Assumption:

"The house was perhaps a little less ugly than that of the Impasse des Vignes, but the nuns having to give up the best rooms to the pupils, we were one on the top of the other. There was one long room, so low that we could touch the ceiling with our hands, which served as dormitory and infirmary. It was a sort of Noah's Ark, containing the choir-nuns, lay sisters, those in good health and those in bad. It went by the name of the yellow dormitory, because we ended by putting up curtains of that colour to make separate cells and thus give a little more privacy to its occupants. Our Mother and Mother Thérèse Emmanuel slept for a long time in this room. Our refectory was below stairs in the cellar, and was as dark and ugly as possible. Many postulants retreated at the sight of this dismal room, but theirs were not solid vocations, so there was nothing to regret in it.

"Our first mothers were in the right. It was

necessary to establish the foundations of the Congregation on poverty; the postulants who did not seize this idea did well to leave. More supernatural and better-founded vocations on the contrary found an indescribable and hitherto unknown charm in this felt —and sometimes painfully felt—poverty. It was sharing the mystery of the Bethlehem and the crib; far from complaining, they tasted a true joy in it." [1]

"Blessed house," exclaimed one of those happy Sisters of the noviceship of Chaillot (afterwards Mother Marie Walburge), dwelling in retrospect on those days, "house denuded of all that flattered the senses or satisfied human pride—poor and inconvenient! Those who dwelt there could indeed put into practice those words of St Augustine in his Rule: 'It is better to have fewer wants than to have many things.' *There* souls seemed to breathe only the air of heaven; the earth with its joys and vanities was trodden under foot. Every Sister did her utmost to do without all that was not absolutely necessary, in order to enter into the spirit of detachment which was in keeping with the Rule of the daughters of the Assumption. And yet what joy and animation was there in this life of poverty! What joyous laughter resounded through the low and gloomy room of the old house during the time of recreation! How well we slept on our palliasses in the yellow dormitory, or in the garrets changed into cells: even in the clock-tower where the wind came in from every quarter! We were happy and proud of our holy poverty which savoured so strongly of Bethlehem: therein was the secret of our happiness.

"The Assumption was then in its spring-time. It was in truth the garden enclosed of the Spouse, where the sweetest flowers, the most luscious fruit were to be found. . . . In those good old times all the religious were young and full of life and spirit. The

[1] *Origines de l'Assomption t.* 2, p. 350.

most venerable of the Mothers were barely thirty years of age, and were radiant with grace and beauty; indeed, the world hinted maliciously that in order to enter the Assumption, it was necessary to be a woman of wit, and to be young and pretty. It was there that our dear Mother governed her little kingdom with the authority of a queen and the tenderness of a mother. She it was who gave the propelling power to all that went on in the house. Obedience was simple, easy and joyous. Sister Thérèse Emmanuel was our model. The Assumption consisted of a true, tenderly-united family. People who came into personal relations with us were astonished at this union, and used to say 'they seem to have but one soul and one heart.' And it might with truth be said that the mutual love of the first Sisters, and their entire confidence in their Mother, were what saved our little barque in the storms and difficulties of the early days of the Foundation. The admiration of the nuns of the Assumption for their Mother was shared by seculars and by many eminent men, who, as we have already seen, came in contact with her. No one could have had an hour's conversation with her without recognising in her a mind which threw light on all the questions which came before her, and a maternal heart which sympathised with all in trouble or affliction. It was the possession of these qualities which gained for her the confidence of parents and the rapid increase of the school."[1]

So far we have dwelt on the defects of the Convent of Chaillot, especially as they affected the community. There were, however, great counterbalancing advantages; for, besides the improved situation, the house stood on three acres of ground which were beautifully laid out, and adorned with fine trees, and clumps of lilac and flowering shrubs. Mgr de Hercé in a letter to Mother Marie Eugénie remarks on these advan-

[1] Ibid., p. 152.

tages : " Your abode close to the Champs-Elysées will be a great boon to the families of that brilliant quarter. Your simplicity of life will present a touching contrast to theirs ; and your spirit, replete with kindness and amiability, will induce them to confide their children to you. Luxury is one of the plagues of our day ; but you well know how to use the tact which is required to open the eyes of these poor blind people, and make them see in what true riches consist. Your generosity and contempt for riches, your love of poverty, will show them that you carry in your heart a treasure superior to all earthly treasures, and will raise their thoughts to heavenly things."

The history of the Foundress of a Congregation (from which we quote the above) goes on to say : " The special work of the Assumption, that of education, developed rapidly in the convent of Chaillot ; some of the first families in France sent their children there. We read the names of de Tremoille, Fitz-James, Harcourt, Rohan, Chabot, Talleyrand de Périgord, de Lignes, and many similar ones, on the register of the school at this period." [1] " It appears," wrote the Superior, " that we are in such favour in the Faubourg St Germain, that we shall not want for pupils. The Duchess of FitzJames was here yesterday taking up my time, to bring me her youngest daughter. In our plans and schemes for the future we were far from contemplating that this would happen ; but if we are to believe these gracious ladies, our reputation is so secure that in bringing us their children the only anxiety they have is about details regarding their diet or their wardrobe. One must also add that those who confide their children to us are women who favour a plain unworldly education. Mdme de Montmorency, who intends sending us her niece Mdle de Valencay, is common-sense itself. What do you think of these developments ? We let them come without doing

[1] Page 253.

anything to draw them. I do not find this has stood in the way of our getting *bourgeois* families, and we are determined to keep a firm hand on them so that the spirit of simplicity should not suffer."

The methods and teaching of the Assumption had even at this early date attracted the favourable notice of authorities on the subject of education. On one occasion Mgr Dupanloup said to the Superior: "I should be grateful to you if you would put down in writing a few remarks on the views you take on the subject of studies, and the direction you aim at giving them."

In obedience to this request a programme of studies was drawn up by the Superior, of which the following was the preamble:

"Our vocation is to work for souls. Our object, therefore, in all our lessons, as in all our dealings with children, is to have the good of their souls always before us, and to give them no other thoughts and ideas than those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to develop in them faith, love of the Church, of purity and Christian doctrine."

The sketch of the teaching of their own language which it was proposed to give the children is so good, that the reader interested in such matters will thank us for giving it without abbreviation:

"*French language.*—The close correlation between the thought and the word. The importance of giving children the habit of using simple, pure and accurate language. Care should be taken in the instructions on language to develop the child's judgment from an early age. Later on, whilst giving lessons on style, stress should be laid on the importance of expressing just and Christian thoughts under a pure and simple form; of avoiding as subjects of composition whatever is addressed solely to the imagination, and is incompatible with a commonplace, hidden life."

The headings of the other subjects taught at the

Assumption are arithmetic, geography, history, Church history, literature, natural science, and religious instruction, upon which a few words of explanation and amplification are likewise given.

We learn also from the *Fondatrice* that philosophy was not long in taking a place in the plan of studies. Mother Marie Eugénie soon realised that philosophy forms a necessary link from the point of view assumed by her of the formation of souls; it develops and fortifies the reason, prepares the foundations of faith, and strengthens religious convictions. The teaching given at the Assumption, accordingly, was not remarkable for the matter, which was similar to what was universally taught elsewhere, but for the manner, the method and the spirit. "To know a little more of one thing or another," Mother Marie Eugénie used to say, "is not what constitutes the superiority of one person's mind over another. It consists much more in the direction given to the mind, its special genius and the development of its individuality." Instruction, according to her, should have for its object the strengthening and maturing of the mind; it should teach the child how to think and *to will:* e.g., to know what she wills, and why she wills. To raise the mind to enlighten and fortify the will—this is what instruction should aim at doing; and all teaching should tend to produce this result: such were the views of the Superior of the Assumption. "Other houses of education, even religious ones," she said, "seek to appeal more to the imaginative and affective faculties; we aim at appealing to the mind in order to render it more Christian by developing it, and to the will so as to make it capable of sacrifice and self-renunciation." Such an education is in modern phraseology both intellectual and pragmatic. To make a study of faith; to entertain a reasoned conviction on the subject of Christian truth, to discover this truth everywhere, in all that one learns, in every

branch of education ; to seek and discover the relations between truths in the natural order and those in the supernatural : in one word, to illuminate all things by the light of faith, and thus to penetrate into the whole content of Christianity : such was the spirit of the education given at the Assumption. Studies, however, understood in this sense, and stamped with this character, exact from the mistresses who are in charge of them an intellectual power which, inasmuch as their aim is higher, requires to be in proportion more deeply founded. This Mother Marie Eugénie fully recognised ; and she sought to guide her daughters into those larger fields of thought wherein her own mind found itself so much at home. " Formerly," she said, " we were blamed for making the younger Sisters learn Latin and read passages from the Fathers. It is true that if it had been only question of training teachers of grammar and geography, it would have been unnecessary to do so. But to achieve our objects by means of education, that is to give a Christian character to the soul, a wider range of knowledge is required ; a body of doctrine, solid foundations from which after-developments may in time be built up. To render our studies Christian, accordingly, it was necessary to study seriously the Christian standpoint ; and the works best adapted to this object are those written in the earliest and most Christian times ; in the period when the Fathers of the Church brought the deepest and most enlightened knowledge to bear on the Gospels."

Mother Marie Eugénie was on sure ground when advancing these views on education ; for her authority for them was that of the angelic Doctor St Thomas. A modern writer using almost the same words, gives chapter and verse for them. He says : " The intellect is the master-faculty in man ; it is this that ought to direct us. It is the intellect which prepares the paths of faith, and it is in the former faculty that this great

virtue dwells" (*cf.* S. Thomas, 2a, 2æ, 9.4.2.2). "When the directive functions of the intellect have been supplanted, not only nature but faith suffers from it, and the spiritual life is vitiated. This is just what is happening to-day. Sensibility, which holds a second rank in man's faculties, takes the first place; it even aspires to direct our piety. Thus it is that life becomes a matter of feeling, and faith an impression." [1]

The author of the *Fondatrice*, sums up Mother Marie Eugénie's opinions in the following words. "Instruction is nothing without education; for this to be truly and solidly Christian, it should be established on the basis of natural virtue. Of what use is piety—if one could give that name to certain religious exterior practices—if it never penetrates to the inner soul? The Christian who is wanting in the virtues of the honourable man dishonours his faith, and borrows a mere mask of hypocrisy from religion. Mother Marie Eugénie, and all the Sisters employed in the school, following her lead, did their utmost to develop frankness, simplicity, courage and a sense of honour and duty in their pupils. Christian piety should transfigure the virtues of which the germs exist in the human soul, and penetrate them with its spirit; it cannot dispense with them; and, to speak truly, if it has not as its first object the development of this essential basis of moral life, it is nothing but an illusion."

Mother Marie Eugénie sought specially to instil a love of the poor into the children, because it is essentially an evangelical virtue, and there is no more effective remedy against the egotism which begins to show itself at such an early age in children. The Superior describes the steps she has taken with this object to Fr. d'Alzon thus:

"We have formed an association of charity over which I preside. The pupils first of all gave their votes for those who, in their opinion, by their charity

[1] *The Interior Life*, edited by Rev. F. Tissot, p 21.

and good sense, were worthy of taking part in the association, and sufficiently pious to bring down God's blessing upon it—and also, I should add, sufficiently industrious to work for the poor. Children who are turned out are deprived of their vote and, I can assure you, they are very severe. They then elected counsellors and a treasurer. Every fortnight cases are put before them of persons in want, and an account given of the families they have helped. New associates can be received after being voted for, on condition their account-books are well kept, and that they are found not to have spent too much on themselves or on useless things."

As the school increased in size, the good works undertaken by the pupils increased and developed in more than one useful direction—their main object being always kept in view: namely, that of encouraging a desire of helping the needy at the cost of personal sacrifice.

A few words must be said of Sister Marie Augustine before we conclude this chapter on the educational methods of the Congregation of the Assumption.

It will be remembered that when M. Combalot sought to enlist Anastasie Bevier in the little battalion in which he proposed to fight secularism in education under the banner of our Lady, pointing out to her a long row of musty folios inscribed with the names of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, he told her she would have to study them. Such a prospect would have acted as a deterrent to many girls of twenty, but they had a contrary effect upon Sister Marie Augustine. This love of books and all they imply never left her; and after she became a nun, it was turned by her superiors into the useful channel of directing the studies of the convents of the Assumption—a post she occupied for nearly sixty years. We read of her that she exercised her powers with the goodwill, the self-abnegation, the devotedness and

ardour of a saint. Needless to say that this holy nun gained a great ascendency over the children by her gifts of head and heart. If they were to be believed, there was nothing she did not know, and her gift of language—what is described as her *parole entrainante*—gave her an unequalled authority over these young souls, who are so powerfully influenced by the spoken word.

A very short time before her death in 1894, being questioned by one of her Sisters in religion on the spirit which had guided her in her task, she answered in words which, in part at least, are worth quoting:

"I have never thought that there was a system of teaching proper to the Assumption. I have always thought that the spouses of Jesus should propose to themselves as their first object, the glorification of the religion He has given to the world. I had early understood that man owes all his moral greatness to that holy religion; Count de Maistre taught me that the nations of the earth owe to it their prosperity and true glory. Holy Churchi s so worthy of God, so beneficent to man, and from that point of view alone so unmistakably divine! It is Jesus Christ working through the centuries and doing good. In short, I have loved to show the children that our holy religion responds so perfectly to the requirements and the noblest aspirations of our nature, that it has Him necessarily for its author who made us. . . . We were taught the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope by M. Combalot from the Foundation of our Congregation of the Assumption; I clung to it from my very heart—all the more so because we had the good fortune to be brought in contact with holy priests who professed this truth ardently. Believing as I did that the Vicar of Christ was infallible, and therefore that he could not be mistaken as to the extent of his powers, because that was a question of truth and justice, I have always recognised in him, now, as in the past, all the powers he claims. I have interro-

gated the Popes, I have listened to their voices in their Bulls and in the letters and exhortations quoted in the history of the Church, and everywhere and at all times I have heard them affirm that the powers they attributed to themselves were inherent to their office as vicars of Jesus Christ. I have believed them as I believed Leo XIII, when he declared that the direction of all campaigns in defence of religion belonged of right to him. To what superior tribunal can an appeal be made against their decisions? Where here below can we find one?

"That is in my sight a Christian teaching; it is a teaching applied to the glorification of our faith, and loyal in its acceptation of the doctrines of the Holy See and of those only."

CHAPTER XIV

O amare! O ire! O sibi perire! O ad Deum pervenire!
St Augustine.

The first start of Fr. d'Alzon's Congregation of Assumptionists corresponded almost to a day with the departure of the nuns from the Impasses des Vignes and their establishing themselves in their convent of Chaillot. The new Congregation was to comprise a body of religious properly so-called, and a third Order formed of priests and laymen. To the three monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience taken by the first-named, an additional vow was added of working for the extension of God's kingdom in souls. For fear, however, of awakening public hostility, which about this time had been strongly excited against the Society of Jesus, the new Congregation in the beginning sheltered itself under the comprehensive name of Association.

Fr. d'Alzon had prepared the way by giving a retreat to the staff of priests and laymen of the college which he had founded some years previously at Nîmes. He described what had been done to Mother Marie Eugénie in these words :

" My dear Child,

I have only one moment to spare between my Mass and the last exercise of the retreat given to our young professors ; and I will devote it to you in order to tell you that a definite resolution was taken yesterday with regard to the formation of a Third Order, which will take the name of Association till such time as the First Order exists. You and Sister Thérèse Emmanuel were especially present to

me during the Mass which I said for them. Pray hard that the result of all this may be to God's glory."

Fr. d'Alzon, though obliged through motives of prudence to mask his designs to the world, was none the less determined to make all the sacrifices which are entailed by a religious life. Accordingly, on the 12th of October, he went to take leave of his parents and of the home of his youth, Lavagnac, in order to take the necessary steps for handing over the succession to his sister Mme de Puysegur. A letter to Mother Marie Eugénie shows that this sacrifice was not made without his feeling the full weight of it.

"Here I am," he wrote on the 15th of October, "staying with my parents, having come to make my first act of dispossession. I am a little alarmed by the manner in which I still make use of what no longer belongs to me; but everything cannot be done at once, and one must rest on the mercy of God for the complete carrying out even of our most earnest intentions. There is no doubt about my being intended to make my sacrifice with full consciousness of what I am doing, as never have I seen this place more beautiful. It seems as if there was a conspiracy against me! We have had some of those glorious autumn days such as I have never seen excepting here, when the peaceful and beautiful light of our sun seemed to give fresh life to the trees and plants exhausted by the summer heats. But, good heavens! of what use are such thoughts. . . . I must acknowledge to you that I find it a grievous thing to be satisfied with so little, when I think I have something of a very different nature awaiting me to counterbalance a fortune of a few francs, and even some of the most glorious autumn days in all France."

These were not the only sacrifices that Fr. d'Alzon felt himself called upon to make as a religious. There was what St John Berchmans calls the daily martyrdom

of life in common, which, put in plain terms, means not only stripping oneself of one's possessions but of one's very self. Accordingly he writes a little later to Mother Marie Eugénie describing his new life : " We are now, Beiling, Sauvage, Decker and I, sleeping in the same room. At this moment as I write, nine of our young men are studying with me—I making the tenth. The others are with the pupils, or giving lessons." This is the Third Order in its beginning. Alluding to the Congregation he hoped to found, he writes to the same correspondent : " I have only three who have positively made up their minds to join me. M. Henry, a young priest who will undertake the duties of procurator and prefect of discipline. M. Laurent, who is to be ordained at Christmas, and is at present professor of the fourth class, and M. Cusse, professor of French. Cardenne will come to us, but I am not sure if he will decide at once. M. Tissot will make an excellent religious, but one will have to overlook his many defects of want of method and order ; and at his age, I doubt the possibility of his correcting himself of them. Our chaplain also is a good man, and would be better still if one had not to be perpetually lecturing him to do his work. I have only one man here on whom I can depend—and even he ! The others are good, pious, devout ; but the instinct of self-devotion is wanting in them. I am always asking of God someone upon whom I can lean. I do not find any such. The Abbé de Tessan lives at home ; besides we are not so much opposed to each other as we are different from each other. . . . It is clear therefore that I must learn how to make use of these men without leaning on any of them. A trying situation, and yet perhaps after all, a very useful one, because by this means one is sure of counting only on God. You see therefore how I am situated. The question to be solved is : What ought I to do ? Would it be better to start at Christmas by forming a nucleus

of the Congregation, or begin at once with the above-mentioned elements. Give me your advice about this. I have a great desire to have light thrown on the situation—with regard to which I feel at times that I myself know very little."

He writes again to the same correspondent on 5th December: "It is decided that we constitute ourselves novices on Christmas night." This decision taken, he goes on in a later letter to Sister Thérèse Emmanuel to inquire about the usages of religious Orders. "You are so well acquainted with Fr. Lacordaire, you must be able to find out from him: (1) whether he sleeps in his habit; (2) if he keeps on his belt, as is prescribed to Benedictines; (3) if he makes his bed himself; (4) if the rule fixes the hours of sleep. I have not seen these details in their Constitutions, but I think they have special declarations with regard to them. Our fathers have a great wish to become religious. . . . We shall be at least six in the novitiate; it is a good many, and yet few enough! I am a hundred miles from our Mother, and I have not Sister Thérèse Emmanuel to support and advise me. However, it is to be hoped God will be with us. Our novitiate will be a long one, and, so as not to excite suspicion, we shall have to be very prudent for fear of not obtaining the necessary authorisation; but I am not altogether sorry to have to advance slowly, in order that we may not have to retreat. Pray hard to our Lord, my dear child, that all I do may be for Him and with Him. Heavens! am I not a lunatic to think myself capable of such enterprises?"

Some of the practices of which Fr. d'Alzon speaks in this and subsequent letters may seem trivial enough. But to those versed in the spiritual life, the "science of the saints," they will mean a great deal. For they mean the practical application of our Saviour's words: "If any man will follow me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me." And there is no cross

which is harder to bear, and yet which makes us resemble Him, and therefore *follow Him* more closely, than that of poverty, and the self-renunciation which it implies. It is a yoke—the yoke of Christ. To bear it we have need to learn the lesson which can only be learned from Him. We must be meek and humble of heart, and so only shall we have peace in our souls.

In the same letter in which Fr. d'Alzon announces that he has made a beginning to Mother Marie Eugénie, he writes: "After coming from making my thanksgiving, several novices asked me leave to sweep their rooms. I told them that I had expected they would wish to do so, and that the brooms were ready. I had told them previously that I would do my best to give them the example, and inspire them with the religious spirit, and that I would suggest practices to them, but that I should not impose any upon them unless they asked me to do so. This method has answered very well, anyhow as a beginning; for as to future novices, when they come they will fall into line. They have also asked me for straw palliasses. One of our professors, who two months ago wanted to have his room papered, came this morning to ask for one which was unpapered. On Christmas night," we read later, "I assembled them again, and I praised one of their number who had begun practices of obedience towards me. I then read out practices which I had prepared; I, kissed their feet to show the attitude of service and of subjection, which, as superior, I wished to adopt with regard to them; and now we have fairly started!"

To appreciate Fr. d'Alzon's action in the matter, we must recall the days in which he lived. France was only slowly recovering from the social and religious upheaval of the previous century; and he was addressing himself to the sons of the Revolution. There were good men among them, pious and humble men, as he tells us—but how foreign to them, even to the most fervent, must have been the customs and prac-

tices of the monastic life such as he was now training them to adopt!

That it was not all plain sailing we know from a few words which he every now and then drops into the ever sympathetic ear of his holy penitent, who, as he told her on one occasion, was his only confidante on these matters. But of these we shall hear more later. The great question to be solved at the time which we are now describing, was whether the newly-formed Congregation should continue at Nîmes, or shift the scene of action to Paris. Paris means France to all Frenchmen, and, it may be added Frenchwomen, and the moment when Fr. d'Alzon was carrying his intentions into execution was eminently favourable to the transfer. The reader will possibly remember that the College Stanislas was Fr. d'Alzon's *alma mater;* it was also the centre for the higher studies of the Catholics of France. In the year 1845, M. Gratry, the celebrated writer, was at the head of the college; and his great desire was to lay down the burden of office so as to be able to devote himself to his philosophical studies. It was said of him that he aspired for nothing more than to escape from a situation for which he felt no sort of aptitude. And yet this work, which he was incapable of performing, was, he realised, an essential one for the days in which he lived, because it was only by the education of youth that the Church could regain its hold on society. The Abbé d'Alzon shared his opinions entirely on this point; and the latter, without confiding his intentions to Gratry whilst on a visit to Paris in the summer of 1846, told him that he was convinced that the necessary weapon to put in the Church's hands was a new teaching Order—a Congregation of men living under a religious Rule, but who at the same time had been trained to the methods of work which the progress of science and modern educational views rendered necessary. Gratry at once rose to the idea, and threw him-

self into the plan with the ardour and spontaneity which he manifested in all his views. He also thought that this priest whose views were so comprehensive was the one designed by Providence to carry them out; and he expressed his unequivocal desire that M. d'Alzon should install himself in Paris and make the Stanislas College the first foundation of a project which they both deemed would be as fruitful as it was necessary. "To prepare our forces for a great Catholic teaching—that should be our task; and who knows if God is not waiting for us to be prepared before removing obstacles to it?" Thus spoke the Abbé Gratry. He added another argument in his eagerness that Fr. d'Alzon should take a step which in his opinion was a decisive one: "You have been moved by a divine inspiration to renounce all ecclesiastical dignities, and have taken the last place, the hardest of all, that of the education of youth; and directly afterwards the finest college in France is offered to you. Well, our Lord wishes us to learn from signs. This one does not appear at all obscure. Life is short: men are losing their souls. Let us hasten to the thick of the combat. The thick of the fray is that of a great college situated in Paris suitable to be the basis of an ecclesiastical seminary, and moreover to serve as a centre for deep studies in apologetics. It is in the thick of the fray because the fighting takes place principally in Paris, and the arms for the fight are precisely those of education and science. A formidable host is arrayed against us in the form of false science and inferior education. Incalculable resources are open to us in true scientific knowledge and education conducted in the right channels. But there is not a moment to be lost."

These arguments were not thrown away on Fr. d'Alzon; but he did not allow himself to be dazzled by the brilliant prospect held out before him. He held on his way steadily—or rather on the way which he believed to be indicated to him by the leadings of

Divine Providence. Mother Marie Eugénie, like Gratry, thought this offer was an indication of God's will, and used her influence in the same direction. To her he made the following reply in a letter which bears no date, but which belongs to this period :

" Assuredly I should offer no opposition to the Will of God if I have to go to the Stanislas College ; but there is nothing to press my going there for three or four years. I am quite aware that in time it will be necessary for us to have a house in Paris ; but what God appears to ask of me at present is to consolidate firmly the one we have here, which, thanks to Him, is going on very well. The centre, or if you like the nucleus, is here ; it should not be transplanted until it has begun to sprout, for fear of injuring the interior growth." He adds in a spirit of true humility, " Let me tell you also of a feeling I have which perhaps you may tax with pusillanimity, but I am afraid of Stanislas. Should I succeed there as I do here ? This fear does not come from self-love. It rests on a consciousness of the graces I have received to prepare the ways far from Paris and of not going ahead of Providence."

On Fr. d'Alzon's return to Paris in the spring of 1846, in order to preach the Lenten course of sermons at Notre-Dame des Victoires, Gratry renewed his overtures to him. Gratry's representations were backed by the Archbishop of Paris. But to these and other influential friends in the capital he made the same answer : that the time was not ripe for it. Providence had placed him at Nîmes, his Congregation had only just come into existence, and it would be risking its future well-being to transplant it before its members were fully formed.

The Archbishop appreciated so much the force of these objections, and the value of the man, that he conceived the idea of putting him at the head of the diocesan schools and seminaries, believing that the

direction which he would give to the education of youth might start a general movement throughout France which would, by a counter-stroke as it were, contribute powerfully to the triumph of liberty of education. For would not Catholics be taking the best means of persuading their adversaries that they were worthy of that liberty, if they were able to point to the results which they had achieved, in spite of the shackles in which they were bound by a government monopoly ?

Though Fr. d'Alzon declined both these offers, his stay in Paris and his sermons at Notre-Dame des Victoires were not without fruit for the new Congregation. His piety and eloquence attracted several young men who felt, or thought they felt, a call to the religious life. If out of the number only one persevered—M. Saugrain, afterwards known as Fr. Hippolyte—it need cause us no surprise. The truth of those words spoken by Him who was Truth itself is for ever being exemplified in the matter of vocations : " Many are called, but few are chosen." Meanwhile we find Mother Marie Eugénie urging her director to be prepared for a future in which she saw large possibilities of work for extending God's kingdom : " Train the men, my dear Father ; " she wrote, " the works will come to you, for it is the men who are wanting to the works, and you have received gifts by the help of which, and with God's concurrence, you will be able to form the necessary men wherever you may be. The great difficulty is to train men who can replace you in those houses where you are unable to be present. Do not think so much of extending the work where you now are, as to consolidate it and to prepare subjects for future foundations."

A letter from Fr. d'Alzon to Mother Marie Eugénie, dated 17th May 1846, shows that the state of her soul and the desire he had for its advance in perfection—and it may be added for his own—suffered no loss in

those days of stress and uncertainty about his future and the future of his Congregation.

"I break off," he writes, "but only to say with a profound sense of what we should be, one to the other, '*Sursum Corda!*' Let us raise ourselves up to God: *there* all is peaceful because all is perfect. Let us imitate God's perfection by our good will, and peace will be given to us; Let us aim at perfection in all things; God wills it and His grace gives us the means of attaining to it. For His grace is the greatest gift that His love confers upon us, and it is given us with the one object of uniting us to Him and our brethren. . . . I must tell you more: that I have the desire, and by the grace of God a facility for keeping habitually in some higher atmosphere, which I hardly know how to describe, in which faith communicates to me thoughts and impressions which seem to separate me from the miseries and nothingnesses of earth. I wish I could speak at greater length, but I have still letters to write before saying Mass. I shall pray for you, and shall ask our Lord that He will fasten you to Himself, and me with you, so that henceforward, counting on each other, we may pursue His work in reciprocal confidence and devote ourselves to it without measure or limit. . . . If God intends that we should be a support to each other, may it be in order that we may throw ourselves more ardently into His arms and advance yet more in His love, and in the union of our natures with His eternal perfection."

A little later Mother Marie Eugénie consults Fr. d'Alzon on the subject of a wish expressed by the community, with one exception, to rise at midnight to recite the Office. This is his answer:

"The almost unanimous desire of your daughters to rise at midnight seems to me admirable. I think also that you did quite right to wait before making the attempt, when you found that one amongst you

was seriously opposed to it. It is very beneficial to cause the stronger to aspire to heroic deeds, and it is very necessary to condescend to the weaker, whose fervour ofttimes becomes greater on account of the condescension that has been practised towards them. Since the vows were taken before the habit of rising at night, I think this respect of a whole community in the face of the opposition of a single member, is worthy of all praise. This independence upon questions in which obedience has no say is one of the merits of your Congregation. If the opposition, however, were of long continuance, and the community remained of the same mind, the affair might be settled by your using your power of dispensing the Sister from coming to Office." He goes on to say that perhaps in time the Assumptionist fathers might adopt a similar practice; but, as they only have six hours sleep, he does not think it would be wise to interrupt it.

We read, however, that in the course of that year, both the nuns and members of Fr. d'Alzon's Congregation rose at midnight to recite Matins, but they were ultimately forced to give it up, as it was found to be incompatible with the chief duty of those Orders, which was that of teaching.

The correspondence between Mother Marie Eugénie and Fr. d'Alzon in the years 1846 and 1847 speaks of many trials, especially of those of the Founder of the Assumptionists. Though the College prospered, there were priests who talked of retiring, masters who required to be propitiated, trouble with the pupils. We gather, reading between the lines, that Mother Marie Eugénie feared that Fr. d'Alzon, in his zeal and self-devotion, rose to heights to which all his confrères could not follow him: also that he attempted too much. Thus she gently lectures him with her usual prudence: "I beg of you, my dear Father, not to let your thoughts and forces be too much absorbed with present work, however good; live as a father of

a family; a superior of a novitiate; as a Founder of an Order, for the future and in the future. Form good religious; seek to establish a strong sense of union between them. Do not overwork them. Give them all the time necessary with each other and with you for them to feel a fraternal joy in the service of God. Do not work them too hard in anything. You will see that the future will bring you a hundredfold reward, and that the daily increase of even an hour's study at the present moment would not outweigh the advantages you would gain by a conduct towards them which would be more economical of their forces, because in this way more men, and capable men, will join your community owing to the high character it bears. The minds of your brethren will also gain in strength and intelligence from being more humoured and less constrained by incessant study. As a general rule, a sufficiency of sleep and recreation is required for the brain to work properly."

Fr. d'Alzon answered this letter as follows:

"I look forward to your letters with great pleasure, my dear daughter. I need all the consolation I can get in these days of trials of all sorts, of changes and defections. . . . You must not be alarmed about the shortness of our recreations. We have an hour together from half-past twelve to half-past one, and again at half-past eight to a quarter past nine, and our recreations are very gay. Next year when we shall no longer have lay-masters in the house, we shall be brought together more closely."

A certain vein of boyish fun occasionally lights up the correspondence between the director and his penitent, which recalls the practical jokes which in his early days Emmanuel d'Alzon used to play on his tutor and other personages. For instance, alluding to a pious lady of his acquaintance, he says: "Mme de X. kills me with her absurdities Could you not get her to undertake some translation? The Mysticism

of Goerres for instance! I think she might be able to do that sort of thing much better than the portraits she does of me, with an aureole round my head and cherub's wings fastened to my shoulders, which she distributes amongst her friends and acquaintances. Think how pleasant that is for me! If I can get hold of a specimen, I will send it to Sister Mary Augustine to make her laugh."

A letter of the same year (1846) announces the formation of a Third Order of the Assumption. It is settled that the members will meet weekly in order to work for the poor, and in particular for members of a club of girl-apprentices patronised by them. The Refuge founded many years previously by Fr. d'Alzon was the place of meeting and the same ladies occupied themselves with that institution. Mother Marie Eugénie rejoiced greatly at this new departure, as she looked upon it as a means of spreading the spirit of Jesus Christ in the world. Fr. d'Alzon wished the Third Order of women to be considered as being especially attached to the convents of the Assumption; and though he ranked as their Founder and spiritual Father, he ever looked upon Mother Marie Eugénie as their superior. A similar Third Order was soon after established in Paris with M. l'Abbé Duquasnay as director, and Mme de Pontalba as first president.

This is not a life of Fr. d'Alzon; and we have only been concerned in explaining his life and character on account of the light they throw on that of Mother Marie Eugénie, otherwise we should dwell longer on the gifts he displayed in leading souls, both young and old, to God. A great deal might be said about the influence he gained over the youths of his college. The following discourse (or rather an extract from one) which he spoke on a certain occasion to the young men who were finishing their scholastic year gives an idea of the practical nature of his teaching:

"The young Christian who enters society should

take with him the religious equipment which he intends to stick to through life. We do not propose to make cloistered men of you but men of the world who behave so as to make their faith loved and respected, who cling with all their souls to God's cause; who grip hold of all that is true and strong and compelling in the laws of the Church; who find a bridle to their passions in a strong religious sentiment; but, let me repeat it, we have no intention of making seminarists of them. Why, indeed, should we train them to pious practices, good in themselves but unsuitable to the path in life which in all probability they will have to tread? Assuredly if we discovered some amongst them whom the voice of God called to a higher life, in whom the hand of Providence had sown the seeds of a holy self-devotion, why disguise the fact that it would be a real joy to us to cultivate those plants. . . . But—do we not know it?—many ideas pass through fifteen-year-old heads which do not remain there very long. Plans are quickly made and as quickly demolished. We learn by experience what we should accept, what should be examined into and what may be left to crumble away of itself. Finally, we know that this house is open to young people destined for any of the careers which the world unfolds before them, and for all those in which a Christian prepared for the encounter can do good to his fellow-men, and in which he can be of service to the cause of religion. This is the direction which we give to the piety of our pupils."

CHAPTER XV

"There is nothing in life that is so beautiful that the sacrifice of it is not greater and more beautiful." J. Le Maistre.

Though in the preceding pages we have traced Mother Marie Eugénie's growing influence in the religious world and even outside it (and we could have done so at much greater length had space allowed), if we would penetrate below the surface, we should find that her soul never moved from its centre where it reposed in God and in the manifestation of His divine Will. This ever-increasing desire to live in God and for Him, and to become detached from creatures is very manifest in some notes she made of a retreat in Holy Week in the year 1846.

"I prayed at night and during the day fairly well: desire that I might be allowed to ask God to give me my purgatory here, so that nothing should keep me from going to see Him directly after death: a strong feeling of my great need of reformation—if it were possible, of a severe novitiate: desire for crosses, even for the hardest, as long as they purified me and made me pleasing to Jesus Christ: resolution to tend always to what is most perfect: offering of myself in the state of victim: a love and attraction for the practice of penance, believing that it may be unite me more closely to God.

"I never desist from asking Fr. d'Alzon to make me die—and crucify all within me that is purely natural. What greater favour could I ask of him? That he should make no mistake about this would set a seal to my confidence in him. I feel the want of acquiring a more universal charity; he helps me very much in this; in fact he always does me good, even when

what he says disturbs my mind, for he obliges me to struggle against my faults. To live in peace is something for *me*, but to struggle against my defects is for the sake of God and my neighbour, and that is what really matters. He leads me ever towards what is good, sometimes with more joy and consolation, sometimes with less, but as long as I tend to that it matters little whether I live or whether I die. I have after all a certain attraction to suffering all I can for God. One of my chief joys is to find that I have made a sacrifice for Him; even in the very pain of sacrifice I am happy, as soon as I am sure of making it. I have a habit of greeting with a smile, even when I am alone, the little pains and annoyances which come to me, as if I was pleased at taking them from God; and this I do from the bottom of my heart. If I were required and were able to sacrifice all my faculties to God, I should do so with exultation. I am afraid of bearing physical pain; but if I were given strength to bear it, I should rejoice at suffering martyrdom for God's sake.

"*Good Friday.*

"I was greatly drawn at two o'clock to give my hands, and all that I am, without resistance to Jesus Christ, and to be crucified with Him. I promised Him this. I prayed hard to our Lord on the Cross for myself and all our Sisters—especially by placing them beneath the Blood flowing from His heart. I resolved to be patient like Him in suffering all that happens in this short life. . . . I applied all the imprecations in the psalms to my defects. May God deliver me from them! they weighed down our Lord in His Passion.

"At Tenebrae I was filled with the thought of our Lady's anguish. The canticle *Non videbo Dominum Deum in terra viventium* pierced me to the heart. If St Teresa experienced a greater anguish only in our Saviour's visits to her, and a more vehement desire to

be with Him in Heaven, how could our Lady have consoled herself, even after the Resurrection? He is in Heaven, and she is left on earth; and I also feel the deepest sympathy for her and a wholly personal love of her. I have asked of her to pray for me whilst I suffered with her in her sadness."

Later on she writes:

"I am called to a triple servitude:
"All to God for others;
"All to obedience for God;
"All for others for God's sake; but never anything for self.

"Once more I surrender all possession of myself, having always usurped it unjustly. I will never henceforth say, 'here at last I have got a moment to myself.' Never will I make use of anything as claiming it as my own, nor of any of my faculties in the same sense. If it should happen that I have some moments when obedience has no claim upon me, and my Sisters ask nothing of me, I will then give myself to God for them. My watchword shall be: All for God for them; all for them for God. My penances, my prayers, my communions, my spiritual possessions all belong to them; I will only ask for myself the grace of being a faithful servant."

In the long yearly retreat made in September 1846, we find the following resolutions:

"To weep over sin; to fly from sin; to satisfy for sin.

"To live with the one object of loving God; to apply myself to knowing Him; to performing my actions in His presence; to have an *effective* love for Him by trying to do all that He asks of me; to be reverent in my praise of Him, tender on account of His goodness, trustful in His liberality, fearful on account of my sins, and the sins for which I am respon-

sible in others, pure as a result of separation from the world, and from myself, and by good use of creatures; zealous to procure the same benefits for others: finally to occupy myself incessantly with the love and knowledge of God, and to make progress in it so as to go forth from myself and lose myself in it.

"These are the virtues I should seek to acquire: Obedience, strict regularity, penance, patience, a spirit of compunction and of prayer, a contempt of self and of all that passes away, and charity."

If we are tempted by the notes of retreat and correspondence of Mother Marie Eugénie to look upon her as given up entirely to a contemplative life—with the exception, of course, of the duties involved in the work of education—we should miss the keynote of her character. Zeal for the salvation of souls, and that the petition which we daily recite in the Lord's Prayer (and which means so little to the greater number), "Thy Kingdom come," should be fulfilled were the true motive powers of her life. And these aspirations necessarily brought her in contact with the world outside the convent walls. What she said of herself many years before; that she would wish that the love of God would increase in her heart so that she might spread it on all weary hearts had come true. Paris then, perhaps even more than now, was a centre of attraction to many who were flying from persecution in their own countries, or to those who looked upon it as a headquarters of missionary enterprise and work for the heathen, so that Mother Marie Eugénie soon came to be known as a refuge for the destitute and for all in trouble. There are probably few now alive who remember the story of Mother Macrina, who, with her community of thirty-eight nuns were the object of the furious persecution of the Russian Government in the years 1844–5. Only four of the number survived the tortures they underwent for no other crime than being faithful to the Roman See, and refusing to

abjure her religion and join the Orthodox Church. The Superior Mother Macrina was one of these, and as Mother Marie Eugénie had been previously brought in personal contact with Polish priests—who likewise had been forced to save their lives by flight from the tyranny of the Czar—at their suggestion she made a home for Mother Macrina whilst she remained in Paris.

Mother Marie Eugénie appears always to have had a warm corner in her heart for the Polish nation. It was afflicted and persecuted, that was an all-sufficient recommendation to her; and when later on, in the year 1846, two priests came to Paris to seek for help and encouragement to start a religious Order in Poland, she used all the influence she had in their behalf. The objects of the Order met with her fullest sympathy, for they were to be directed to the extinction of the schisms of Eastern Europe, and the revival of faith and piety by the establishment of Christian colleges. This Order took the name of the Resurrection, and has done, and is still doing, admirable work in Poland and the neighbouring countries. Fr. Peter Semenenko, who was its first superior, was succeeded by Fr. Kassiewicz; and both these holy priests preserved lasting feelings of gratitude to Mother Marie Eugénie. Fr. Peter Semenenko's health broke down in consequence of overwork; and when wintering in Tunis, he wrote (12th of January 1848) a letter of which we give a short extract showing the nature of his feelings towards her:

"I have such confidence in you, and I look upon your soul as so truly a friend of my soul in the love of Jesus Christ, that it is a consolation to me to open my heart to you. What I have to do is to become a new man, and I am determined to be so by the grace of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Pray for me that I may profit by His holy grace; and once I am rich, I will

repay you for all your kind offices to me by giving up to you all I possess. Even now I give you my poverty which you will not refuse; and I pray our Saviour, the source of all riches, to fill you with His treasures. . . . You will write me a long letter, my dear Mother; I shall expect it. You will speak to me of your soul, so that I may take part in all that is happening in it, and that we may have all in common, that we may thank the Lord for the blessings He has given and pray to Him out of His goodness to give us all that is wanting to us. You will also tell me, if you can spare the time, how your work is getting on: and your Sisters, how are they? Particularly your Mistress of novices, and the Sister who bears the name of the great St Augustine, whose works are at this moment my delight. . . . And now, my dear, good Mother, may we repose in the most loving Heart of Jesus Christ; may He be our only happiness, our one thought, our unspeakable treasure. Let us unite ourselves in His holy love and may Jesus be ever with us.

"PETER SEMENENKO."

The influence which Mother Marie Eugénie exercised for good outside her convent walls was especially observable in the case of the newly founded Order of Assumptionists and of its Founder. Fr. d'Alzon's work was growing; the college was not large enough for the increase of pupils and professors, and the question arose whether additions should be made to the existing premises, or a new building erected on a different site. Fr. d'Alzon inclined to the latter proposition. An architect was consulted who drew up an elaborate plan which was submitted to Mother Marie Eugénie. She was far from approving of it; the plan was wanting in monastic simplicity; it would cost a large sum with no corresponding advantages. Other plans were drawn up and shown to the Superior, who consulted on her side a man of the name of

Buchez who besides being a well-known art critic, was also an employer of labour, and a judge of such matters from the financial point of view. After mentioning his opinion on the question of the different styles of architecture which should or might be employed, she continues :

"I conclude with what finally Buchez recommended me most strongly to say to you : It was to weigh well the undertaking ; to dread and avoid building if possible, or at least to renounce the idea of a highly ornamented structure such as the first one, so as not to compromise the success of the work itself. 'Everyone of the most promising works which have been started in late years have broken down through pecuniary difficulties,' he said. 'Let M. d'Alzon be careful before he embarks upon it. Before doing so he should make sure of having the necessary funds. Government may interfere and shut up the college ; troubles might arise, and miscalculations deceive him as to his resources ; and the result might be a failure which would bring to nought, with no chance of recovery, what is likely to be a source of great spiritual good.' She adds : "My prudence leads me to the same conclusion. What you say about depending on prospective school-fees terrifies me. I feel more and more alarmed when I think how much you stand to lose in this venture."

A measure advocated in the Assembly by M. de Salvandy about this time, which if carried, would have rendered the status of non-government colleges still more insecure, put a stop to M. d'Alzon's plans.

This was not the only cause of anxiety which Mother Marei Eugénie had about the good Father. His letters show that he was suffering physically and mentally from his austerities, and from excessive labour in his two-fold capacity of Founder and head of a college. It appears that Fr. d'Alzon had been deeply impressed by the life and works of de Rancé, the great Trappist and

reformer, and he was bent on emulating his life of penance. Accordingly she writes :

" What you tell me is a real source of distress to me. How I wish I had the care of you ; for I am not at all of de Rancé's opinions in your case. Or rather I call it frankly absurd to apply them to a man in your position. If you were a Trappist, good heavens ! you might be as ill as you wished to be, and take all possible means to be still worse, and it would make no difference to your vocation. But in your position, for goodness' sake eat beef, and be free to give yourself up to the work which depends on you for its very existence. I have never thought that the main point in aiming at perfection was what one ate or drank—I was saying so lately in the Novitiate—as long as we stick to obedience and holy poverty. I should look upon a hundred relaxations on that point as preferable to the smallest display of temper, or of inequality of humour, or failure in the performance of duties. . . . We are but beasts of burden in our merciful God's service. Who would not choose rather to let his horse or his ass have time to rest and give him a little oats rather than reduce him to a state in which he could be of no service."

A month later (14th May 1847) this letter is followed by a still more strongly-worded one.

" Will you do me the favour of leaving de Rancé alone for a while, without reading one word of his, or taking one principle from him ? And will you take the life of B. Suso, the works of St Gertrude, St Teresa and St Francis de Sales for your spiritual reading instead ? Above all take, if you do not disdain it, the spiritual conferences of St Francis de Sales to the nuns of his Order which have been the means of sanctification of so many souls. I think they are perfect ; not only for women but for men also, who would find in them the wisest and the most perfect spirit as applied to religious life. Will you do

this, Father ? If I could only persuade you to replace your fears of sloth, by the fear of not preserving, in the fury of your zeal as soldier, the strength and liberty of spirit required for being always a good general ! Permit me to lay stress specially on liberty of spirit ; it is for the sake of others that I would wish that you should keep yourself in that happy equilibrium of which the result is that one is always ready to receive everything and say everything in a kindly spirit. You make constant sacrifices of your tranquillity, but you forget these sacrifices fall also upon others, because you are not half yourself when they come to you to ask you to help them. Oh how much better it would be for you to take the necessary time of rest and recreation, for then, you would be wholly at the disposition of those who come to you and meet them with serene countenance and an open heart."

Mother Marie Eugénie ends her letter by saying : " Is not this a grand sermon ? Deign, my dear Father, to listen to this poor preacher, who grieves to be obliged to leave you now without having time to say anything more except to renew the expression of the devotion which has dictated all her sermon."

Fr. d'Alzon's answer shows that he received it in the same spirit with which it was written. " Your good scoldings always give me pleasure. You know so well how to give them that even when I do not profit by them, I am always glad to have them " He also undertakes to exchange de Rancé for St Francis de Sales His repentance, however, came too late, as the next thing we know of him is from a letter written to him at Eaux-Bonnes, whither he had been sent by the doctor in consequence of a complete break-down of health. Such an opportunity of " pointing a moral " was not lost on Mother Marie Eugénie ; and she frankly asks him if he considers that he gains more by sacrificing his health than he would by preserving it by prudence. " I believe," she continues,

" that it is a recognised thing amongst your religious that it is impossible to do what you do. So, in that case whom are they to take for a model ?

" Come back from Eaux-Bonnes, my dear Father, a little more imitable, slow down your pace for the sake of your flock, after the example of Jacob, whom St Francis de Sales admired so much. When your followers have got the habit of walking in your tracks, you will be able, bit by bit, to accelerate their pace without their perceiving it, and meanwhile poor Jacob will not suffer by his exertions. I have also, I must tell you, asked our Lord to give you in this time of rest and solitude a true and strong supernatural view of all that it is needful for you to do and to be." In conclusion she says : " I should fear almost to annoy you with what I say, if it were not that my heart dictates the words to my pen ; also because my devotion to you has sufficient self-abnegation in it for me to resign myself to displeasing you, provided I serve you."

Fr. d'Alzon thoroughly realised the value of a friendship such as the holy Superior's, and on one occasion he wrote : " No one has more right than you have to dictate to me what I have to do when it is a case of going to God." And again we find these words : " You know well that I ask for nothing better than to be mothered by you."

When we remember that Mother Marie Eugénie at the time these words were written, was barely thirty years of age, we feel that no better proofs can be given of the prudence and supernatural lights by which she was guided. Moreover, Fr. d'Alzon not only trusted to her advice upon spiritual and even temporal matters, but she appears to have been his principal adviser about the subjects who asked for admission into the Order founded by him. After the retreat he preached in Paris in the Lent of 1846, there were no less than ten applicants, and as events made it

necessary for him to hasten back to Nîmes at its conclusion, he left to her the somewhat onerous duty of forming an opinion on the merits of these before sending them to join him at Nîmes. She seems to have discharged this office with both tact and discernment and to have earned not only Fr. d'Alzon's gratitude by it but also that of the young men who eventually put themselves under his guidance. The acquaintance thus made was kept up by all parties with every mark of encouragement from Fr. d'Alzon, who was not slow to see the advantages which his religious derived from it. On the other hand, the latter appreciated the benefit of Mother Marie Eugénie's influence over their Superior. Fr. Cardenne, who was one of the first to join the Congregation, puts this opinion very strongly. "I will conclude my letter," he wrote, "by telling you of your power and influence over our work. Your words have an almost magnetic force over Fr. d'Alzon's mind; one of which I should be afraid did I not know that it came from the Holy Ghost, of whom in this matter you are only the intermediary. Your last letters have already produced their fruit."

The latter sentence had reference to reforms required in the College. According to the general opinion the Superior held the strings of government so tightly that he left nothing to the initiative of his subordinates; and, from attempting to do everything himself, he failed in training those under him, whilst his health suffered under his excessive labours.

In a later communication between Fr. Cardenne and Mother Marie Eugénie (22nd October 1847), he writes:

"It is specially at this moment that I ask to look upon you and honour you as my Mother, I may say as our Mother, as I cannot doubt that you are one of the channels by which our Lord wishes to convey the true Christian spirit and the force and prudence to

our work of which it is so much in need. I have already more than once thanked our beloved Master for the wisdom with which He has inspired you to say the right thing at the right time. Nothing could have been more opportune than the arrival of your last letter just as we were going into retreat. . . . Finally, I must say for your consolation that I do not hesitate at declaring that your letters during the coming year will be the objects of my meditations and spiritual reading; the last more especially will be the code of my principles and resolutions in what you call our 'fighting' novitiate. My efforts will be directed to nourish my soul upon it, and let it penetrate my being as coming from Jesus Christ Himself from whom all we have is derived."

Mother Marie Eugénie at the time she was corresponding with Fr. d'Alzon and members of his community and seeking, so to speak, to throw oil on the troubled waters, was not without grave anxieties herself about the future of her Congregation. An excellent priest, Fr. Gabriel, had been appointed Chaplain to the community from the time it was established at the Impasse des Vignes and afterwards at Chaillot, but M. Gaume continued to be their spiritual father; and in that capacity he exercised, both in his own person and through his influence over the Archbishop of Paris, a considerable controlling power over the Congregation. Mgr Affre still held to his opinion that the Rule of the Assumption was *trop belle:* in other words too ambitious, and that to combine teaching with a life of prayer and contemplation was too great a tax on human nature. He would have had the latter to be subordinate to what he considered the true end of the Congregation, namely that of education. It was, therefore, with deep forebodings that she saw as the time approached for the Constitutions to be drawn up in order to receive the approbation of the Holy See, modifications introduced which would

entirely change the spirit of the Order. In a letter she wrote to Fr. d'Alzon we can see what she felt on the subject. After mentioning her fears, and her wish to publish a little directory for the use of her Sisters which would contain advice drawn from the works of St Jane Frances Chantal, St Teresa, and others, on the sanctification of the day's actions, she continues :

" I feel, however, perfectly calm in regard to all these things. I am determined to do all that is in my power with prudence and firmness so that the vocation and spirit of the work should survive. I accept all the other transformations that Providence may permit it to undergo ; but this essential part of it I confide to God, and I abandon myself entirely to Him who will always remain to us all even should this work no longer exist."

It was, perhaps, in answer to this letter or a similar one that we find the following remark in one from Fr. d'Alzon's, written about this time :

" You are of all the women I know the one in whom I have noticed the most peaceful self-possession combined with the greatest power of feeling things."

CHAPTER XVI

"La force du mal est en ce monde moins redoutable que la faiblesse du bien." GUIZOT.

THE Revolution of 1848 found Mother Marie Eugénie in retreat. Probably rumours—rumblings of a storm which was about to burst—had previously reached the convent, but they had not been of a nature to disturb the community, or to move them from the even tenor of their way. She was in the sixth day of the retreat, when, on the 24th of February at mid-day, a discharge of cannons announced that Louis Philippe was dethroned and his place taken by a provisional government.

The Superior sent a message to her daughters through Mother Thérèse Emmanuel to tell them to turn to God, for it was a moment to arm their souls with confidence in Him and courage, should He think them worthy of suffering for Him. All the answer she made to those who showed fear was, "God is here, we must pray hard."

To Mlle Achard she wrote, "The Revolution troubled my retreat somewhat. The last two days were those of the flight of the King, and the setting fire to Neuilly. As no one could be sure beforehand that the peace of communities and individuals would not be troubled, I had to keep myself informed about the trend of events and take necessary precautions against an invasion of the populace. The sacred vessels and plate were sent away, and also our documents, and the order was issued that, if an attempt was made to break into the convent, we were all, Sisters and children to meet together in the chapel. Some men entered the Jesuits' house and that of the

nuns of the Faubourg St Germain in order to search for firearms, but the offer being civilly made to show them all over the place, they behaved well and touched nothing. As for us, we have been treated as if we did not exist at all; we have not even had orders to illuminate. Paris is calm at present but very dull; the depression in industries, trade and finance is extreme. Workmen are asking impossible wages, and manufacturers, in paying them, are preparing the way to bankruptcy. The clergy and Legitimate party are the only ones satisfied; the latter however, not without a mixture of anxiety.

"As for Fr. Gabriel, he is quite republican in his sympathies. No words can express his kindness and devotion to us in the midst of these anxieties. He has taken the greatest precautions to preserve our quiet. A working-man who is wholly devoted to him watched over us, and had undertaken, in case of attack, to warn the National Guard. Besides this he was always there, himself, ready to harangue the people, by whom he is much loved; or if not with us, he was in the fighting-line in order to give absolution to the dying—returning afterwards to give us news of what was happening. One thing which will reassure you yet more is that we have some devoted friends actually in power, and even at the head of all the administrations. On one of the first nights of the Revolution, one of these placed a patrol to guard the house. But after all, it is in God that I place my whole confidence; He has been proclaimed and honoured, and the churches and priests have everywhere been respected. The first watchword of the Republic was 'God alone,'—that is really admirable, whatever may come to pass in the way of material sufferings. Adieu, my dear daughter, I must go and take advantage of the Blessed Sacrament being exposed; we have at this moment so much to ask for—for France and for the Church."

Fr. d'Alzon had been urged by his numerous friends to stand as candidate for the new House of Assembly. Mother Marie Eugénie would offer no opinion on the subject. She wrote: "It is a question for you and your sons to decide. . . . A distinction is now beginning to show itself in the republican party; it is between those for whom the Republic has never been anything but a political combination, and those who would wish to make it the basis of a social transformation. The *beau rôle* of Catholics is to belong to the latter; one feels that to be logical. Accordingly, the people incline towards them, and they have shown their confidence in them by a thousand proofs. All the same, all is not golden in the prospect; a mere nothing may mislead the people, and they are the masters. The worst-disposed clubs in Paris are not those of the working-men, but of the students. The club, however, of which M. Bouix is the head he has well under command. On one occasion the members were asking for the abolition of the clergy stipend, and he spoke so strongly about their universal charity and generosity that the contrary vote was carried by acclamation."

This comparatively happy state of things was not of long duration. A month later Mother Marie Eugénie wrote again to Fr. d'Alzon, the letter being dated 25th March.

"Do you know that several things make me alarmed about you should you, as your last letter seems to indicate, join the National Assembly. I would, as I have already told you, accept the risks for a benefit, which was likely to be far-reaching, but when I see bands of workmen passing daily who are agitating for the least possible amount of work; when I hear from the contractor who has charge of the works that those men who are given forty-five thousand francs a day by the City of Paris in order to find them employment can with difficulty be persuaded to give the value of

ten thousand francs in return for it, I tremble for the poor National Assembly, which will have to face, in addition to the already insoluble question of the organisation of work, that of having to solve it for people who refuse to work. What will the Assembly do with this idle mass, and what will it do with the Assembly ? "

That was the grievous problem, the result of which was the organisation of labour by means of the national workshops. She continues later : " The horizon is getting darker for Catholics : M. Carnot's letter ; the decision upon the question of the *Temple ;* the two last articles in the *National Gazette* against bishops, and other things, as you know, have damped many hopes. As for me, who have known the republican party too long not to have been prepared from the beginning for outbreaks of despotism and irreligion on their part, I have let Buchez know for some days past that I should be glad of his help and advice as to the means by which our Congregation could provide against attack."

Buchez was one of those men who come to the surface in troublous times, but who, on account of some weakness, mental or physical, fail to dominate the storm and end by being swept away by it. " He enjoyed a great popularity among the working classes," (we read in the *Fondatrice de Congregation*), " he dreamt of a reconciliation and union between Catholicism and the forces of the revolution, because it appeared to him that they were both actuated by the same principles and pursuing the same ends." Catholicism, according to him, tended like the revolution, towards a millennium in which a universal brotherhood would reign, and the doctrines of equality and fraternity would be carried to their logical conclusion : in short the lion would henceforth lie down with the lamb. Mother Marie Eugénie had no confidence in Buchez as a statesman ; but she appreciated his good

qualities and the great interest which he had always shown in the Assumption, and she felt she could depend upon him in an emergency.

A month later she writes to Fr. d'Alzon : " There will be a good number of *Buchezians* in the Assembly ; but what a misfortune it would be if there were not some who are purely Catholic without harmful antecedents and without prejudices, capable of pursuing a straightforward orthodox course, and not led by simply political formulas, proper names or leanings ; not by the Republic, but by an ideal of Christian society under a republican form." What are these suggestions but a faint foreshadowing of the Encyclical of Leo XIII ? For should not the aim of the true lover of his country be to raise himself above parties, and to look above all to its spiritual and material good ? This was the only way of saving France, as it is that of saving every other country.

Some remarks made by Mother Marie Eugénie in a letter to Fr d'Alzon about candidates for the General Assembly show great shrewdness, as well as that entire freedom from prejudice which was one of her characteristics.

Speaking of the Bonapartist Party, which promised to be a strong one in the future Chamber, she says : " As for the Prince (Louis Napoleon) himself, a thoroughly honest man in whom I have great confidence, after having listened to him and ascertained his views when meeting him in the intimacy of the society of mutual friends, said he was amiable, conciliatory and moderate in his opinions ; that he appeared to be upright in his intentions ; in short, he thought well of him. About here, the Jesuits, M. de Montalambert and M. Dupanloup appear to favour his party. From the information which I have received, I have been led to believe that he is well disposed towards them, which diminishes the fears I expressed to you in my last letter. But he is afraid of bringing upon himself

the displeasure of the University by pronouncing openly in favour of liberty of teaching. I think him a little weak and a time-server."

In another letter she writes, "As for Fr. Lacordaire, there is no calumny which has not been employed to injure his candidature, especially in the last few days. They have had the incredible craftiness of persuading the good folk of St Sulpice and of St Thomas that he was a communist to the extent that he had not a vote in all St Thomas of Aquin's district, and very few in any part of that quarter. To the mass it was said that he was a monarchist; to the Conservatives that he was a strong radical; to the people that he was a general of the Jesuits, whilst one was seriously told in the Faubourg St Germain that he was on the point of renouncing the Faith!"

The General Assembly met on 4th May, and Mother Marie Eugénie, writing again to Fr. d'Alzon, deplores the weakness of most of the men in power. Of Buchez, who had been nominated President, she says: "My dear Buchez is too easy-going, too complaisant and too much of an idealist to rule the Chamber and to keep order in it, and, in short, to show the necessary aptitude for the presidency. He is acquitting himself as badly as possible, and the amount of time lost there is half due to him; whilst his influence is absent among the rank and file, where his knowledge and his sincerity in the cause of law and order ought to have gained for him the adherence of a certain number of representatives, who, though not wanting in goodwill, float about without knowing which side to take."

A little later she writes again, lamenting the powerlessness of the ministers to grapple with a situation which was daily getting more dangerous: "The republicans will have killed the Republic. It was necessary for them to have got into power in order to gauge the little they were able to do. God alone is there to give us the government which we need. His provi-

dence is possibly acting in such a manner as to make use of men in transforming parties. It is only Christians who sincerely love the people and would work for them; unfortunately the Christian members of the Assembly—and there are some—are not sufficiently capable."

The closing of the national workshops in June was a signal for the outbreak of civil war. Street fighting of the most furious description at once began. Twenty-five barricades were set up, and defended and attacked with equal vigour by the mob of Paris and the army under General Cavaignac.

Mother Marie Eugénie never for a moment gave way to panic during these trying events. She took all necessary precautions for the safety of the community and children, and possessed her soul in patience. The parents of the pupils who lived in Paris or its vicinity for the most part recalled their children. On one occasion only she had to resort to extreme measures to ensure the safety of those left under her care. She received a warning that it was possible that a raid would be made in the night on convents where there were children, in order to put them in front of the barricades so as to prevent troops firing upon them. To provide for their safety, she sent them to her uncle M. de Franchessin, where they remained for a night, bivouacking on couches and pillows in the large sitting room of his apartment, till it was considered safe for them to return to Chaillot. For four days the battle raged with varying success on either side. Mother Marie Eugénie, writing to Fr. d'Alzon on 26th June, describes the situation as follows:

"We have spent the night without undressing. People were afraid that the insurgents who had been expelled from St Lazare and the Faubourgs St Antoine and St Marceau would fall back in this direction, where they would have found powerful support in the working classes. Incendiarism was also feared.

This morning people are beginning to feel a little reassured. What remains of the insurrection is a long way from here, quite at the back of the Faubourg St Antoine and the Faubourg St Marceau." A few hours later the news reached her of the death of Mgr Affre.

The details of this heroic death are known to all: still they cannot be omitted in the Life of the Foundress of the Assumption who had ever found the kindest friend in the Archbishop—one who had stood by her in the days when she was deserted by M. Combalot and when the very existence of the Congregation was threatened. We read in the *Origines* in an account drawn from the history of the Second Republic (by de la Gorce) that the Archbishop, moved to profound compassion for the fratricidal warfare that was being waged, informed General Cavaignac of his intention of mounting the barricades and bringing a message of peace to the insurgents. Cavaignac, who had a sense of the heroic, was touched by the proposal. He represented to the Archbishop the extreme danger of the step, but finding him immovable in his determination, he praised his courage and confided to him a proclamation of peace in which he had adjured the rebels to lay down their arms. "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep," was all Mgr Affre's answer to those who remonstrated with him. He then returned home, made his confession as if he was on the point of death, and started for the quarters held by the insurgents, followed by two of his vicars-general and his servant.

It was six o'clock in the afternoon. People were struck with emotion at seeing the Archbishop wending his way on foot to the square of the Bastille. The Gardes Mobiles, sceptics as no doubt for the most part they were, carried away by the solemnity of the moment, asked him to bless their arms. The officers pressed round him and describing the risks of the

fighting, implored him to give up his intention. "My life is worth so little," he said; and going on, he stopped only to bless the wounded and dying on his passage. Those who saw him were struck by the unaccustomed brilliancy which seemed to light up his countenance.

Arrived at the square of the Bastille, he found a scene of death all round him. The body of Negrier, who had been shot, had just been carried away from the field of battle; the representative Charbonnel was on the point of death. The fighting had lasted for some hours without decisive result on either side. The Archbishop addressing himself to the Colonel in command, asked him to give orders to cease firing. "I will advance alone," he said, "towards those unfortunate deluded people; I trust they will recognise my purple cassock and the cross I wear on my breast." The firing ceased on the side of the National Guard; the insurgents' fire slowed down and finally stopped.

Taking advantage of this tacit truce, the Archbishop advanced across the square, a young man preceding him holding a white flag as a sign of peace; notwithstanding his orders, his servant and some of the National Guards followed him in order to protect him. He advanced up to the great barricade which closed the entry into the Faubourg St Antoine. A number of the insurgents came down into the square, some soldiers advanced also hastening to fraternise with the others. The Archbishop spoke with much earnestness urging all hearts to peace and reconciliation.

Everything pointed to the success of the proceeding, when a beating of drums followed by a discharge of firearms led to the idea that negotiations had been broken off. Great agitation followed in the ranks; the Archbishop strove to allay it by gesture and voice. At this moment a bullet fired from a window, struck him in the loins. He fell, saying, "My friend, I am wounded," to a workman who received him into his

arms. The insurgents, who were thunderstruck at the sight of the fall of this august victim, transported him to the neighbouring priest's house of the parish of Quinze-Vingts.

A little later, the news that peace had been restored was announced to the Assembly and received with acclamation. And at the same time the Archbishop re-entered his palace to die. His return was a triumph. The illustrious victim was placed on a litter, the workmen of the faubourg, the soldiers and National Guards disputing who should have the honour of carrying it. The sad procession, composed of officers, soldiers, priests, medical men, started through the streets which were still obstructed with barricades, the people as they passed, kneeling and making the sign of the Cross. As for the wounded man, his prayer constantly repeated was : " May my blood be the last to be shed." He was assured that the civil war had ceased and this thought seemed to soften his pains. On arriving at the Archbishop's House, he blessed for the last time the soldiers and the crowd. The next day, at four o'clock in the afternoon, he gave up his soul to God.

" Mgr Affre " (the *Origines* continues), " was a saintly bishop. Though by character timid, when it was question of a duty to be discharged, no one could be firmer. The predominating feature in his character was a horror of publicity, dread of disputes, love of retirement ; but no hearts are more ready to respond to God's voice when He speaks than those of the meek and humble."

" I cannot describe to you," we read in a letter of Mother Marie Eugénie, " the emotion which has been manifested by all classes of the population at the news of his wounding, his danger and his death. . . . The death of Mgr Affre has been a call of God to the people of Paris, and it would appear that they are prepared to respond to it to a degree beyond anything that could have been expected."

CHAPTER XVII

"Qui non zelat non amat."
St John Chrysostom.

The year 1848 which began so stormily ended in peace. Like all others it had brought its trials to the community at Chaillot. The death of three pupils in the course of the summer was felt very deeply by them, and more especially by their Superior: that of a young girl of fifteen was of the number. She made a most edifying end. The two other deaths were of children—infants they might be called—of four and five years of age, who had been confided to the care of the nuns of the Assumption by parents in Brazil and Senegal. The school, however, continued to increase both in numbers and in the esteem in which it was held. The community had also gained largely in numbers; and when a proposal was made to Mother Marie Eugénie to send some nuns to China to found a convent there, she was prepared to welcome it. The negotiations fell through on this occasion, but a few months later, another presented itself about which Mother Marie Eugénie writes (6th February 1849) to Fr. d'Alzon in these terms:

"There is again question of a mission for us, and this time I think it is in earnest. Last Saturday Mgr Devereux, Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern province of the Cape of Good Hope, came to ask me for some nuns. The Bishop has gained all our hearts and it has seemed to us that God had sent him to us in order that we realise our plans for missionary work. Mgr Devereux asks for four Sisters. I see my way to giving him three easily; and these as regards vocation, talents and character seem made expressly for the work. They

are Sister Mary Gertrude, Sister Marie Liguori, and a Sister whom you do not know. The latter is English, a convert, well-educated and clever, forty years of age, for all of which reasons she would be most suitable (though she is yet only a novice), and all the more so because she is keenly desirous to go. I shall add to the number Sister Marie Véronique, who is an excellent and intelligent lay Sister. I know how anxious you are that we should undertake this work; pray then, my dear Father, that if God wishes to send us there that it may succeed. These Sisters are all of a dependable character, and prepared for any trials."

On the 10th of February, she again writes to the same correspondent. "Our affair of the Cape progresses favourably. M. Gabriel who has taken it up warmly, undertook to put it before the Archbishop. He did so yesterday, and first addressed himself to our Superior, Mgr Sibour. The latter when he first heard of it, expostulated on account of the small size of the community; but M. Gabriel having urged all his reasons, and moreover having represented to him that it had to be, Mgr Sibour after laughing slightly at this new way of consulting a person, finished by thinking it a good plan and giving his approval.

"M. Gabriel had more trouble with the Archbishop, who told him we were all off our heads, including himself. As you can imagine, the good Abbé did not take these compliments quietly, and he gave him back all he said with interest, telling him by way of recrimination that bishops were quite wanting in the spirit of sacrifice, that Jesus Christ had not a thousand apostles when he sent them to preach the Gospel; that his Grace had left his spirit of faith at Digne, and I know not what besides! I assure you he neither flatters nor spoils his old friend the poor Archbishop. When he had exhausted his reproaches, Fr. Gabriel gave his reasons, and the Archbishop finished by giving in to them.

"The Bishop wishes to settle the Sisters at Grahamstown, where he lives himself; it is about forty miles from Port Elizabeth, the place where they will disembark. The more I go into the question of this foundation, the more touched I am with the goodness of God, who seems to have reserved this mission for us in which my mother's heart finds nothing at which to take fright. The good which can be done there is incalculable. So far there are few Catholics among the colonists, and the converts made among Kaffir women frequently fall off from want of persons of their own sex to train them in Christian morals. The colony is very extensive, and with time branches might be established. Cape Town has twenty-five thousand inhabitants, and there are no nuns there. Three poor Sisters are few in number in view of all there is to be done; but we must begin on a small scale. The Bishop is giving us his own sister, who will begin at once to make her novitiate with us; her departure will depend on the opinion we form about her; then after a time, God will send us, and we shall train, more missionary Sisters. Of course we must expect poverty in the beginning. I have much to consult you about on the subject of the mission. The Bishop himself asked me what share of authority I should give him, and what I should reserve to myself. You must help me to define this question. I have only indicated three points resulting from the Rule.

"(1) That the Sisters should be able to write to me without their letters being read.

"(2) That I might be able to recall them.

"(3) That the Superior should follow my advice whenever it was practicable.

"The Bishop is an excellent man, frank, simple and large-minded. I can say anything I like to him; help me to say what I should to him."

A generous soul does not give its confidence by weight and measure, as if treating with an enemy

under the disguise of a friend; accordingly, without knowing it, Mother Marie Eugénie, by the last of these stipulations, gave a handle to Bishop Devereux which he used unsparingly against her, and which brought a work begun under auspicious circumstances to an abrupt conclusion. As the author of the *Origines* puts it: "The Rev. Mother Superior, in spite of her ripe judgment, was carried away by her zeal, by the advice of M. Gabriel and Fr. d'Alzon, and even more by the enthusiasm of her daughters, all of whom would have wished to be sent to the Cape. Amongst these Sister Marie Gertrude unquestionably was the most enthusiastic; she had real qualifications for the missionary life—energy, courage, intelligence and initiative in undertaking good works; she had also the gift of commanding perhaps more than a sense of obedience. Certain humble and religious virtues may have been wanting in her, but Mother Marie Eugénie had confidence in her, and unhesitatingly confided to her the mission to the Cape."

Some months were to elapse before the party, under the charge of Bishop Devereux, started for the Cape. It was necessary for him to go first to England, also to Ireland—his native country—to collect funds for his diocese, which was an exceedingly poor one. It was necessary also for Sister Marie Gertrude to go to England, as her relations were living there at the time, and it was considered desirable that she should interest them in the new foundation.

Providence brought her in contact with various people who were afterwards instrumental in bringing the Congregation to these shores. She writes to the Superior with regard to them:

"I have made acquaintance with several converts, former Anglican ministers who have distinguished themselves by their eminent talents. Mr Newman, Mr Lewis, and several others have taken up our work warmly and would like to see it established in London.

These gentlemen have encouraged me strongly to make acquaintance with the Bishops of Exeter and Oxford, as also with Mr Manning, Mr Allies, and some others of the best-known members of the Puseyite party. Some of these have already received me in a most friendly manner, and have contributed to the mission. They are highly pleased with our truly Christian system of education, and look upon the poverty we practise as being quite apostolic. Newman and Lewis were extremely interested in what I told them about Fr. d'Alzon's Congregation."

Mother Marie Eugénie's letter in answer to the above runs as follows :

" I have no time to say how necessary it appears to me to be that you should act, before God, exactly in the manner I have recommended to you, so that no Sister belonging to the Institute should be able to allege a precedent in the future for departing from the rules which are necessary for the good reputation of the Congregation. A religious carries in her own person those who will succeed her ; and this consideration necessitates great prudence and reserve in all ways. However, I trust you so completely that I have no anxiety about the importance you will attach to my words. . . . I am quite satisfied as regards what you tell me about your conscience, my dear daughter ; only, if this does not shock his Lordship, I should like you to ask his leave to go to Communion every day, or nearly every day. M. d'Alzon and M. Combalot, who have much experience, made me do so almost always when I went out into the world, and it is a great means of keeping recollected in the midst of worldly affairs. Will you tell his Lordship, if you speak about it to him, that I think you require it in the isolation of your life, and that it will do you a great deal of good, will preserve and vivify you with a spirit which has nothing in common with the world whilst you are in the midst of the world . . . I must

bid you farewell, my child, whilst renewing the expression of a tenderness which is very profoundly united with that which our Lord bears for your soul. Be gentle, strong and cheerful. He who has overcome the world, loves you and is leading you. Where could one get on well without Him ? With Him how could one get on badly ? You may encourage vocations ; God will stretch the ropes of our tent if He sends us many souls for the Cape and some day for England. I should be enchanted to receive a number of Englishwomen."

All that remained to be done on the return of Bishop Devereux and Sister Marie Gertrude to Paris was to conclude their preparations in aid of the destitute and far-away diocese, and to get passages for the missionary party.

The Superior exerted herself by all the means at her command to accomplish these objects. It was finally settled that they should sail in the ship *Océanie*, which was taking another party of missionaries, headed by Bishop Pompallier, to Australia, and which was due to sail from Antwerp on the 27th of August 1849. Mother Marie Eugénie accompanied her daughters to Antwerp and saw them off, with a heavy heart indeed, but full of confidence in the future.

Mgr Sibour wrote what may be called a testamentary letter to the Sisters before they sailed, in his official capacity of superior or spiritual father. In it he insists strongly on their union with the Mother-house. The preamble runs as follows :

" We, Archdeacon of Notre Dame, Vicar-General of his Grace the Archbishop of Paris, Superior of the Assumption, hereby authorise our dear daughter Sister Marie Gertrude of the Blessed Sacrament to go to S. Africa, to found and govern an establishment there according to the rules and spirit of the Institute to which she belongs, in the diocese of Mgr Devereux, Bishop of Paneas."

The gist of the letter is contained in these passages :

"We recommend all our dear daughters to keep ever united in heart and soul with the Mother-house from whence they go forth, to which they owe their birth in religion, looking upon themselves as members of the same body, branches of the same tree, children of the same family, remaining attached by filial obedience to the centre of their Institute, and by a lively charity and that holy communion of prayers which unites all souls in the Church, and which unites them still more closely in the religious life.

"We give them the most express recommendation never to relax the bonds which exist between them, and to live always in the same spirit and the same sentiments. Let them remember that division would, in a very short time, destroy the edifice that they are going to raise to the glory of God, and that it would, at the same time, be the cause of the ruin of their soul."

That Mgr Sibour was not unaware that under the changed circumstances relaxations of the Rule, of a superficial character, might be found necessary, is obvious from what follows :

"The Sisters, in order to remain ever faithful to their vocation, will have only to remain faithful to the spirit as well as to the letter of their holy rules and constitutions. If the diversity of localities should require some changes or modifications, the Sister Superior should address herself to the Bishop ; she will then follow his advice and decisions, and will then write to the Mother General to effect these changes, or to obtain the necessary dispensations."

The Kaffir war broke out in the following spring, very soon after the arrival of Bishop Devereux and the nuns of the Assumption at Grahamstown. Beginning in 1850 it lasted till 1852, during which time great fears were entertained for all the white settlers in Cape Colony and the rest of South Africa. The

community were threatened with all the horrors of a war with savages which was being carried on at their very door. In spite of this, they wrote cheerfully to the Mother-house, testifying to their confidence in God and His omnipotent help to preserve them from what seemed like imminent disaster.[1] The anguish of Mother Marie Eugénie at this news about her daughters may easily be imagined. In her letters we see that she feared the worst for them, and all her prayers were directed to their being strengthened to bear the trials before them—even that of martyrdom, should it be God's Will that they should have to undergo it. These fears were allayed after some months' anxiety and suspense; but others arose and this time from an unexpected quarter.

Mgr Devereux was above all a missionary bishop; the wants of his diocese came, with him, before all else, and in his zeal for his people—a zeal which was shared by Sister Marie Gertrude—he introduced novelties into the way of life of the community of the Assumption which were completely at variance with their Rule. These were some of the changes mentioned in the *Life of Mother Marie Eugénie:* "There was no longer any enclosure; the Sisters went out of the house and others entered in full liberty. The Divine Office was suppressed; little boys as well as little girls were admitted into their school; the care of the sick was added to the work of education, this obliging the nuns to spend the night frequently outside the convent walls." In short, all that remained in the way of resemblance to the Rule which the Sisters had adopted under a solemn vow was the name.

"Thence arose two parties, or currents of opinion among the nuns: some were determined to remain

[1] It was during this war that the grant from Propagation forwarded by Mother Marie Eugénie was delayed by a shipwreck. This gave rise to an irate letter from the Bishop, who, however, on the arrival of the sum six months later, recognised that he was in the wrong and fully apologised.

above all religious of the Congregation of the Assumption, and were ready to suffer any trial to maintain their union with it and to adhere to the general spirit of their Rule; amongst the number of these was the Bishop's own sister, Sister Marie Agnes. Others thought that they should belong above all to the mission and to the Bishop. If there was profound dissatisfaction in the Mother-house at the course taken by the community at Grahamstown, there was no less annoyance expressed there (or at least on the part of the Bishop) on account of the nuns sent to help them in the overwhelming work in which they were engaged. In answer to a letter of this nature setting forth his complaints to the Archbishop of Paris, Mgr de la Bouillerie, who had succeeded Mgr Sibour as Ecclesiastical Superior, replied as follows:

"My Lord,

I have been commissioned by the Archbishop of Paris to answer the letter you have written on the subject of the ladies of the Assumption established in your diocese." After explaining that he had taken Mgr Sibour's place, he says he had looked upon the foundation at Grahamstown—one so far removed from the Mother-house—from the first as a great risk; he goes on to say: "I feared that the Sisters, separated as they would be from the Mother-house might, sooner or later, lose the spirit and way of life proper to the Institute, and if the Rule was not strictly maintained among them, that the house of the missionary Sisters would before long become a great source of anxiety to the Rev. Mother General. I must avow to your Lordship that the various accounts which have reached me from the mission have unfortunately served to convince me that my fears were only too well founded. Your Lordship complains that the subjects confided to him were not sufficiently grounded in the religious life. I answer, (1) that this

observation of your Lordship is on this point quite in accordance with my own fears and anticipations which I have just mentioned. I must be permitted, however, to reply (2) that the Sisters you have complained of, and whom you decided to get rid of, directly they returned to their community and were once more subject to the rules of their Institute, have given complete satisfaction to the Rev. Mother General by their submission and good example.

"But does not the evil come from elsewhere, my Lord? and has not the obvious discord of the Sisters belonging to the mission been caused by the exceptional and exceedingly trying conditions which have been imposed on this house?

"(1) The Ladies of the Assumption have the education of young girls for their object in the work founded by them; I have been assured that in your diocese they have been employed to visit the poor and the sick, to sing in churches, and to perform a number of other works of mercy outside the scope of their Institute. (2) The Ladies of the Assumption, though not completely enclosed, are obliged nevertheless to remain within their convent, and not to leave it except in very rare cases and when absolutely necessary; I am assured that in the Mission they are perpetually going out, and remain a long time outside the convent walls. (3) The recitation of the Divine Office is obligatory on the Sisters of the Assumption; and this recitation has to take place at the hours and according to the ceremonial prescribed by the Rule. I am told that in the above-mentioned house, the hours are not observed, and the Rule is not followed. I cannot doubt, my Lord, that your zeal for the salvation of souls, and the difficulties of your position have been the motives which have determined you to permit, sanction, or tolerate this state of things. But on my side I thought it was my duty to acquaint the Archbishop of Paris with the information which I have received and which

I have reason to believe to be well-founded ; and his Grace as ecclesiastical Superior of the community had no hesitation in directing me to have the honour of answering that matters being as aforesaid, his formal advice was that the Sisters should be recalled at once to their community in Paris.

" Please to accept, etc., etc.,
" F. de la Bouillerie."

This decision being arrived at by the supreme authority of the Congregation, little more remains to be said. It is to be wished that it would have been possible to add that it was followed by an act of submission on the part of Sister Marie Gertrude and her return to the Mother-house. Such was not, however, the case. Mother Marie Eugénie, knowing how much it would cost her daughter to obey, in a tenderly-affectionate letter, bids her remember that " Our Lord had obeyed even more than He had worked, and that it was by His obedience that He saved the world. May it be so with you, my poor child ; and may He be the cause of your acquiring great merit in this hour of trial and of your giving a great example to the Congregation."

Sister Marie Gertrude made no answer to this letter. She wrote to the Archbishop of Paris asking his permission to leave her Congregation and join another. M. de la Bouillerie answered it on the part of the Archbishop in a manner which must have enlightened her, if she had any delusions on the gravity of the step she was taking. He said the Archbishop agreed to dispense her from her vows to the Congregation of the Assumption on two conditions. The first was that she should write a suitable letter to her Superior General to acquaint her with her determination. The second was that she should enter a Congregation approved of by recognised authorities. He concludes by saying : " If the second condition

is realised, I wish from the bottom of my heart that the Congregation which receives you may find you an obedient and submissive nun."

Sister Marie Gertrude fulfilled neither of these conditions. She remained in South Africa, continuing her self-sacrificing efforts for the good of Bishop Devereux' diocese, with the Sisters who came out with her from Ireland and those who had joined her community at Grahamstown.

Mother Marie Eugénie felt deeply this desertion of a daughter; of one, too, of whom she had formed a high opinion and had treated with the utmost confidence and consideration. It does not come within the province of a biographer of the holy Foundress to pass a judgment on Bishop Devereux' share in the transaction. It is commonly said in cases of disputes that there were faults on both sides. When, however, it is a question of a dispute between an excellent and zealous bishop and a holy religious, it would appear more seemly, and nearer the truth, to say that there were virtues on both sides, but that unfortunately they clashed.

St Francis de Sales, in one of his conferences, gives us an instance of human nature (as exemplified in obstinacy in following out our own views) displaying itself where we should least expect to find it. His words, besides bearing the mark of sweetness and supernatural wisdom common to all he said or wrote, are so germane to the subject that we feel that they will fitly terminate this chapter in Mother Marie Eugénie's life.

He begins by speaking of obstinacy in the case of superiors and those under their charge:

"If, then, superiors were willing to change their opinion at every turn, we should consider them feeble and imprudent in their mode of governing. But at the same time if those who are not in authority should cling with great pertinacity to their opinions,

determined not only to maintain them but also to compel others to receive them, they would be considered obstinate. It is indeed most certain that the love of one's own opinion does degenerate into obstinacy if it is not steadily mortified and restrained. We have an example of this even among the apostles. It is a matter worthy of our deepest wonder that our Lord God should have permitted many great and noble things done by the holy apostles to remain unrecorded, and indeed buried in the most profound obscurity, while the imperfection of the great St Paul and St Barnabas in their conduct to each other is written down. Doubtless this is a special providence of our Lord who has so willed it 'for our learning.' (Rom. xv. 4.)

"The two apostles were setting forth together to preach the Gospel and were taking with them a young man named John Mark who was related to St Barnabas. On the way these two great apostles disputed as to whether they should take him with them or not; and finding they were of contrary opinion on the matter and not being able to agree, they separated from one another (Acts xv. 37–40.) Ought we, then, to be disturbed and surprised at seeing such a fault as this among ourselves when even the apostles committed it?"

CHAPTER XVIII

"What greater joy for man than to be permitted to labour to bring forth the Divine Image in himself or in others."

ARCHBISHOP SPALDING.

THE Duchess of Leeds was amongst the number of the converts whom Sister Marie Gertrude met in England when settling her affairs before going out to Cape Colony; she had been recently received into the Church, and hearing from the Sister of the good work that was being done in the cause of education by the Congregation of the Assumption, she asked her to negotiate on her behalf with the Superior General for a Foundation in Yorkshire. The special work of this Foundation was to be an orphanage, the Duchess having interested herself in some young girls who had lost their parents and were in danger of being sent to Protestant workhouses, where they would have no means of practising their religion. She offered a house and piece of land close to Richmond with this object, promising at the same time to defray the expenses incurred by the new Foundation. Bishop Briggs, who occupied at that time the See of Beverley, wrote likewise to Mother Marie-Eugénie promising her his support and welcoming her nuns to his diocese. Accordingly, there seemed to be strong evidence that Providence favoured the scheme; and the Superior answered that she would be prepared to send four members of the community to Richmond in the following month of May 1850.

The Duchess had stipulated that there should be one English nun amongst those sent. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel seemed especially marked out as head of the little expedition, and thus Mother Marie Eugénie,

Assumption Convent, Richmond. The River.

Assumption Convent, Richmond.

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in spite of the loss to the novitiate and to herself, did not hesitate to let her go on a duty which promised to be fruitful in good for souls. We see from notes found in her handwriting that Mother Thérèse Emmanuel spent the time which elapsed between the making of the engagement and its fulfilment in earnest prayer, and more than common recollection and union with God.

On 16th May, Mother Marie Eugénie assembled the community in Chapter, and having officially named Sister Thérèse Emmanuel as Superior, gave her last recommendations to her and Sister Marie Caroline, choir Sister, and the two lay Sisters who accompanied them. The community then repaired to the chapel, where the prayers for Sisters starting on a journey were said; farewells—not without some emotion on either side—were exchanged, the doors of the enclosure opened and the four Sisters set out for London. A halt was made there for a few days in order that Mother Thérèse Emmanuel should confer with Cardinal Wiseman and the Duchess of Leeds on the subject of the new Foundation. On leaving London she spent a few days at New Hall, where she had been brought up, and where she met with a warm welcome from the community.

The little party arrived at Richmond on 31st May, 1850. Nature looks its best in early summer, and the first impressions made by the surrounding landscape in the neighbourhood of Richmond on Mother Thérèse Emmanuel were wholly favourable.

"The position of the house is delightful," she wrote to the Mother General. "It is situated on a considerable height, and the garden slopes down to a little river which falls into cascades, the sounds of which are audible in our cells."

The house, though planned in such a manner as to be fairly easily transformed into a convent, was wanting in nearly all the necessities of life. This complete

poverty, however, only added to its attractions in the eyes of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel. Her first act on taking possession was to kneel down with her Sisters and give thanks to God, and then to recite the litany of our Lady. On the following morning they resumed the practice of the Rule, and very soon afterwards they completed their preparations for the arrival of the twelve orphans whom the Duchess of Leeds was sending them. These lived in the house, but they had also some day scholars who, up to the time of their arrival, had been taught by an admirable woman of the name of Burchall, whose life had been devoted to this and other good works. Fr. Johnson, the priest in charge of the Richmond mission, was a Jesuit, and an old man whose growing infirmities made him unfit for the arduous work entailed by a large and scattered mission. His thoughtful kindness for the new arrivals was unbounded, but the state of his health gave them occasion to suffer many privations. They were sometimes for days together deprived of Mass and holy Communion, but not a trace of complaint is to be found, in Mother Thérèse's correspondence, of this or similar trials. No doubt that beautiful thought with which St Vincent de Paul consoled Blessed Louise de Marillac when she was prevented by sickness from going to Communion was also theirs: that "our Saviour is a perpetual Communion to all who are united with what He wills or does not will." If they had trials they also had great consolations; for they were welcomed with open arms by the Catholics living in the district. Amongst these was the Maxwell family. We learn from the *Origines* that Mr Peter Maxwell, when he heard that the community were in want of an altar for their convent chapel, presented them with a deeply interesting relic of the days of persecution: e.g. an altar disguised in the shape of a sideboard, with secret drawers in which the vestments and sacred vessels could be kept.

This was not the only consolation which the little community received in their first foundation in the British Isles. Our Lord reserved a still greater one for them in enabling them to spread His kingdom, and to work for souls.

The river Swale, besides adding to the beauty of the view, did useful work by supplying water-power to paper mills within a short distance of the Convent. The operatives at these mills were an unruly lot, composed partly of people of the district and partly of Irish emigrants. Prejudice on one side and turbulent passions on the other produced the usual result. Amongst the most violent of the combatants on the anti-Catholic side was a woman of the name of Sarah Thompson, who was notorious even amongst the mill-hands for her bad language and evil life. It is related in the *Origines* that one day, a fortnight after the arrival of the Sisters at Richmond, she met Mother Thérèse Emmanuel on her way to Mass. The sight of this holy nun seems to have made an impression wholly miraculous on the soul of the poor outcast. She threw herself on the ground and exclaimed: "This is an angel!" She could do nothing but weep during the rest of the day, and in the evening she went to Fr. Johnson and told him she was determined to give up her bad life and become a Catholic. Fr. Johnson sent her to Mother Thérèse Emmanuel to be instructed; and to her Sarah Thompson opened out her whole soul. She told him that for more than a year she had suffered from remorse for the infamous life she was leading, and added: "When I met you going to Mass, I felt a sudden change come over me. I said to myself these angels can only have come to us to bring us peace: my heart was broken, and I made up my mind to be converted."

The conversion was an absolutely genuine one. Daily the poor lost sheep whom God had so mercifully led into the Fold came to be taught the truths

of salvation. She had much to suffer from the persecution of her former companions, but nothing daunted her. "Formerly," she told Mother Thérèse Emmanuel, "all my thoughts were evil, but now that you have taught me the Hail Mary, I say it night and day. I say it at night and the first thing when I wake in the morning—Hail Mary, full of grace, pray for us sinners." This was all her knowledge and learning and she used it as a buckler in moments of temptation. Her conversion led to many others: in the first place that of her son and daughter; the latter was a girl of sixteen, who before long was persuaded to come to Mother Thérèse Emmanuel to be instructed. These instructions took place every Sunday; and we are told that the Irish hands, who up till that time had maintained their faith by hard blows, were persuaded to substitute for these vigorous measures those of patience and forbearance. Once when the holy Superior was preparing what she should say to her class, she suddenly felt the presence of our Blessed Mother at her side. The impression was so strong that she burst into tears, and shutting up the book, she listened to what the heavenly visitant had to say to her. "Tell them that I am the Mother of God, that devotion to me should accompany devotion to my Son, and that all those who come to me I lead to Him," were the words she felt impressed on her heart. Is it astonishing that under these divine influences, Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's efforts were rewarded with astonishing success? The instructions, which consisted of an explanation of the Faith, were followed by hymns, and a practice was drawn afterwards which had to be kept up for the week. One woman drew that of saying a Hail Mary whenever she heard the name of God profaned; and when she was released from it on the following Sunday she declared that she was worn out, and her throat dry, from the number she had been obliged to say. Another drew the prac-

Assumption Convent, Ramsgate.

Ramsgate, The Cloisters.

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tice of performing an act of charity daily; and this she carried out by getting up an hour earlier in order to attend to the wants of an old man who had no one to look after him.

The first celebration of the Feast of the Assumption in the new Foundation was kept by the community with as much rejoicing and solemnity as the circumstances permitted. It was marked by the First Communion of Sarah Thompson and her daughter, both of whom had been baptised and received into the Church a few days previously. The Sister who gave an account of what had passed to the community at the Mother-house, relates that the orphans and school-children were regaled with tea and cakes after vespers, and that, supper concluded, the evening recreation was spent on the banks of the river, which formed a natural enclosure to the convent grounds.

"Mother Thérèse Emmanuel spoke to us of St Paulinus and his missionaries who had evangelised that part of the country, and lived close to that very spot. I think I see them in their little grotto, and can imagine how they must rejoice at seeing the lamp burning before the Blessed Sacrament. We are their successors; like them we must work at making known the true Faith to those whom heresy has robbed of it."

A little incident occurred soon after the arrival of the nuns at Richmond, which must not be omitted, for it shows that the arm of the Lord is not shortened, and that He is as ready now as in times past to come to the help of His servants. We will give it in the words of Sister Marie Dosithée, who was present when it happened. "We had no water in the house; the stream flowed at the foot of our grounds but it was not drinkable. There was a little brook at the other side of the road where I used to go daily to fill a barrel; it was very fatiguing work. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel had pity on me, and told me that this difficulty should be stopped. She had a little money in hand, so she

sent for workmen and one of them, who seemed to know most about it, thought it might be possible to find a spring close by. They agreed to dig at the cost of a pound a yard. The Mother told them to begin, and she decided that they were to go on as long as the money lasted. The spring was deep, before long the money was spent, and there was no sign of water. 'We must stop,' she said, 'and begin a novena.' On the last day of the novena, Fr Johnson came to say Mass, and after the community had made their thanksgiving, they went to look into the well. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel uncovered it and it was full of water; and that water has never failed us since. . . . I was ill at the time and Mother Thérèse Emmanuel bringing me a glass of water, said to me, 'Drink the water with confidence—it is our good God who sends it to you.' I told our Mother General about it, and she thinks as I do."

The time this holy nun spent at Richmond was one of great and continual graces. We learn this from those who witnessed her constant raptures, when she was lost to all but to her Divine Spouse, and we glean further details of them from her correspondence with Mother Marie Eugénie. On one occasion she writes to the latter:

"I wish always to speak to you about my soul, which I trust is progressing according to God's desires and yours. The grace of a profound feeling of recollection often seizes me. It seems to me our Lord puts into my heart all He would feel in my place for His Father's glory and the salvation of souls. It is as if He wished to accomplish this mission through me. Lately I have felt our Saviour in me like another spirit which produces great effects in mine. He gives me a vigour, a light, an ardour which have nothing to do with my nature. I can say '*Vivo autem non ego: vivet vero in me Christus.*' The necessity of having recourse to Jesus Christ as my only support does me

an immensity of good. I have felt my feebleness and my incapacity for doing His work here to an extreme degree; but I go to Him trusting that as I am acting by obedience I am doing His Will, and that consequently He will give me what I require to accomplish His designs."

Whether the following letter from Mother Marie Eugénie was in answer to this letter or not we do not know; but it tells her what comfort she derives from her letters. "They have only one fault, and that is that they are not dated. I wish much you would acquire the habit of dating your letters when beginning them. Fr. d'Alzon has been here since Wednesday, very tired but so good—with a holiness which seems to become every day greater, more apparent, more humble and more simple. He has said many excellent things to our Sisters; as for me he has not said much to me about my soul, and he is too indulgent; but the impression his virtue makes upon me does me a great deal of good." Allusion is made in one of Mother Marie Eugénie's letters to the visits which Protestants asked to make to the convent. She took a very broad-minded view of such occurrences: "As for Protestants coming to see the interior of the convent, I am quite of the same opinion as you are; it appears to me that we ought to show them the way we live. I like very much hearing you say that you are witnesses to our Lord: that should lead our Sisters to be very holy, gentle, religious at every moment of their lives."

In a letter (dated this time) the 12th of July, Mother Thérèse Emmanuel writes: "M. Gay encourages me and approves of everything. His letter was very kind. He sees quite well (and he was quite right) that I have had to suffer. As St Jane Frances said about the Foundation of Paris: 'I think, O Lord, Thou hast brought me here to learn about suffering and poverty'; so it seems to me I might say, 'O Lord, Thou hast brought me here to make me see

Thy power and my infirmity.' One state succeeds another: either it is all God or all misery. I have sometimes, I think, broken down in my firm confidence in His invisible support; not by any resistance, but because, like poor St Peter walking on the waters, I was very much astonished at finding it was *terra-firma*. I make numbers of acts of confidence, but temptations make me think that God is not listening to me. On the other hand, it is very good for me to be made to feel my feebleness: it annihilates me. I lean upon faith, and I call to mind what God seems to say to me in prayer; in short, I rest substantially upon Him.

"Another thing, my dear Mother; what weight should I attach to those words of light or encouragement which come to me at such moments upon my interior or exterior life about which I consult our Lord? Thoughts have come to me which, if I dared to give implicit belief in them, would strengthen me immensely, and would raise me to God above myself and all else; but I require an assurance based on obedience in order to attach myself to them completely. I must be able to feel that it is God Himself who is speaking to me, and that He will be in me in the substance of what He says to me.

"You will perhaps say that you must hear the words in order to be able to judge properly; but you know me so well that I think you should be able to give me a general rule about them. The words have always reference to the life of Jesus Christ; to His Cross and to His action and power over me and through me in spite of my wretchedness. I should like a guarantee that it is God and not the movements of my own spirit which put these words before me, and produce their effect if I accept them."

In her answer, dated 16th July, Mother Marie Eugénie agrees that it is not necessary in order to judge that Mother Thérèse Emmanuel should enter into many details. "I rely in any case," she continues,

" on your making a note of them, and I shall hear further from M. Gay ; but it is true, that taking them as a whole, I know enough of what our Lord asks of you to satisfy you on the subject as long as the nature of these demands is not changed. . . . God is truly great in His dealings with the soul ; and what is shown to you when rapt or in ecstasy, is not so great but that He would do even greater things if you stripped yourself even more of self. You may trust them, therefore, as long as they have to do with what has already been approved of, or are equivalent to them. If the interior voice asked new or strange things of you, wait for them to be approved of before believing them. The angel of darkness may at any moment transform himself into an Angel of light, but all that leads to privation and emptying of yourself, and to finding support and plenitude in Jesus Christ, such as those impressions you are now receiving, are truly heavenly doctrines, and you need be under no fear of being misled by them. As for the words spoken to you about exterior matters, I think you should attach much less importance to them. God's work in you is your sanctification ; it matters little in those things which do not concern your soul, whether you are mistaken at times, as long as you act always with a pure intention and after having well prayed. God might Himself allow you to be mistaken. In exterior affairs success is not necessary ; we should look only to the fulfilment of God's Will, which will always be accomplished either by our success or our want of it. Profit by what appears to you to be an interior prompting, if you judge it to be prudent and according to God, and continue your way, as satisfied with having erred with a good intention, as of having decided right. . . . You know how for a long time I have wished to see you walk upon the water with St Peter, but without hesitation, and with the confidence of St Placid. That is the mark of your perfection : it is to have *faith*, for the truths which are

proposed to you, and those which you are invited to adopt, are in themselves legitimate objects for the display of the virtue of faith. The *everything* of God, the nothingness of the creature, the all-powerfulness of infirmity leaning on God; the price of sufferings, when united to those of Jesus Christ, *conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui;* is it to walk on quicksands to lean on these things? despising all human powers and supports? And, at this moment, as Superior and placed in a new Foundation, what better thing do you think could be said by our Lord, if He came to you in His own person as in the days of His human life, than what He says to you in prayer? Abandon yourself therefore to these thoughts, not on account of the manner by which they were communicated to you (though I maintain that they are a great grace, since they penetrate you with these ideas); but give yourself up to them because of the truths themselves, which, being evangelical in their substance, are divinely true, and therefore come from God Himself."

Though the Mother General's letters to the Superior at Richmond were marked as a rule by full approval both as regards her official capacity and her interior dispositions, we find that on two occasions the former showed a firmness in rebuke which (circumstances having made it necessary) was equally characteristic of her guidance of her daughters: "I have waited," she writes, "for a little leisure in order to be able to take time to tell you that I do not approve of your writing letters of direction to the Sisters now that you are no longer mistress of novices; for we should give an example of giving up everything when deposed from our offices. It is perhaps my fault for having allowed them to write to you in this sense and therefore to have invited a corresponding reply. I have no time to explain further."

Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's answer runs as follows: "I thank you most sincerely, my dear Mother, for what

you say on the subject of the newly-professed. If I have done wrong, believe me that I desire with all my heart to be corrected. In truth I was much to blame in writing to them as I have done ; I am very grateful to you for reminding me that I have no longer the charge of them."

On another occasion when Mother Thérèse Emmanuel pressed her Superior to send her an additional Sister, so that the community at Richmond might be able to continue the recitation of the divine Office in choir, the Mother General answered in a letter full of kindness and yet of calm dignity, in which she remonstrated with her daughter for having worded her petition in too insistant a manner. To this also Mother Thérèse Emmanuel responded with the same beautiful humility and submission, owning that she had urged the claims of the little community too strongly, and explaining that nothing was further from her thoughts than to dispute the Mother General's decisions. "I had no other thought," she writes, "than to put our wants before you." In this, as in so many similar instances, we see the holy Foundress ever concerned with the future of the Congregation. She knew that her words, as well as her actions and decisions, would be used as a precedent, and therefore she attached the necessary weight to them. Accordingly she writes a little later (29th Nov.) : "You must not forget to prepare your accounts this month, in order to forward them here. As I have said, my strongest reason for being very exact in everything with you, is that no negligence should serve as a precedent for Superiors less loyal and devoted than yourself. But, also, you must not take it to heart when I do what you ask of me after I have found fault with the manner in which you have asked ; for you see, on the contrary, that I speak with perfect frankness, and that I only act according to what I feel is best before God."

The community had not been long at Richmond when Miss Burchall, who, as already mentioned, was a leading spirit in all good works there, asked to be admitted into the Congregation. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel describes her as being, " Short and stout and all her appearance indicating energy and activity. She has goodness and firmness stamped upon her countenance. Her hair is quite grey—which will perhaps alarm our young Sisters. She has the look of those decided superiors, *maîtresses femmes*, whom one so often meets with amongst Sisters of Charity. She has a most tender heart for the poor, whom she helps and comforts and advises ; and whom she weeps over in their falls and welcomes with joy when they make their peace with God." The Mother General, who had absolute confidence in the Superior's judgment, answers to the effect that she will welcome her with all her heart, and (she continues), " I will do my best that her grey hairs are as well received as if they were young and fair. As for me, I find much to love in her from all that you tell me about her, especially when I think of all she has been to you." Later on she writes again : " If, on seeing more of Miss Burchall, you continue to think she would be suitable for our life, do not hesitate about receiving her. She may in time be an invaluable Superior for Richmond. But she should enter without clinging to the idea of returning there, and you will have to make her go through a strict postulantship."

Mother Thérèse Emmanuel answers that she has prepared Miss Burchall for what she will have to go through : the humble position (as last comer) which will be hers in the community, the prospect of the trials which await her in having to renounce her judgment after having been so long in authority, and so forth. To all these warnings the would-be postulant answered gaily : " I quite expect to be put in my place : an old granny like me ! I deserve all

I shall get. It is very good of her to accept me at all."

The Superior writes again on 24th October: "Miss Burchall is accustomed to teach, and is, I feel sure, good at it. She has a chest of iron, and teaches the most ignorant people here all day long: men, women, girls and boys. Her departure will cause the greatest consternation here. It will be looked upon as a general misfortune. She has been everything to everybody—rich, poor, sick, young and old. I cannot think how they will get on without her. Mr Maxwell has written me a long letter giving me many reasons why her departure should be put off till spring. Mrs Maxwell came with Fr. Johnson to say the same thing; she is losing her best friend in her. These generous friends are ready to rejoice at her vocation, but they are anxious about her health, fearing that to make a trial of it at this rigorous season might be the cause of her breaking down. I told Fr. Johnson what care you take of the sick. Like him I wish much that Miss Burchall should succeed; the more I see of her, the more I like her. She would be very useful here later on. She is a friend of all those upon whom the community here depend for help. Lady Lawson loves her as a sister. The Maxwells and Fr. Johnson are afraid she will not be sufficiently appreciated in Paris, but I told them that you knew her merit, and would be kindness itself towards her."

Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's warm praise of Miss Burchall was amply justified. The latter having made her noviciate in Paris, and having been professed there, returned in June 1852 to Richmond as Superior, taking Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's place. Sister Marie Ignace, the name by which she was henceforward known, was a model religious; the virtue for which she was specially noted was obedience. She may be said to have had no will of her own. "Our Mother wishes it;" was her reason for everything she

did or left undone. There could be no appeal from such a decision.

Another postulant, Amy Howly, a cousin of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel, asked for admission into the Congregation during the year 1850. She also persevered, and took the name of Sister Marie Walburge in religion. Providence, in calling these two excellent souls to a religious life and sending them to the Assumption, was filling a great gap left by the death of Sister Claire Emmanuel, a very holy nun of great promise who died on 28th October of the same year, and who was deeply mourned by the Mother General and the community of Chaillot.

The beginning of January brought a visit from Mother Marie Eugénie to Richmond, and was a cause of much rejoicing to the community there. It was also one of great consolation to the holy Foundress, as a letter which she wrote thence to Fr. d'Alzon enables us to perceive. It is dated 12th January 1851.

"I have been very much pleased with everything I have seen so far in this house. I have only seen it amidst the fuss and recreations consequent on my arrival but it seems to me that Sister Thérèse Emmanuel has infused a very good spirit into it; and she is moreover on the best of terms with the people of the neighbourhood, which I am very glad to see. It was a great happiness to me to meet her again, and it appears to me that if I could remain here with her in this quiet little spot, we could live such a peaceful and religious life with our gentle, serious English postulants, that I should wish never to leave it again. But this must not be told to our Sisters in Paris, as they would never forgive me. Besides this peaceful life, surrounded by respect and kindness is not, after all, one of those called blessed by our Lord in the gospel. To counterbalance this I have received a very trying, almost abusive, letter from the Bishop (Devereux) since I came here. The poor man is so

annoyed at not receiving his money in time that he reproaches me vehemently ; but as I am even more distressed than he is at the delay, which was caused by a shipwreck, I have no difficulty in forgiving him."

Returning to the visit she paid to the Oratory in London, she writes : " I cannot tell you how much it touched me. Picture to yourself a poor chapel which had been used previously as a bazaar, or ballroom, crowded mostly with poor people, and so densely that it was with difficulty that, by the intervention of two young Oratorians clad in surplices, a little corner could be found for us half an hour before the sermon began ; and this crowd which a few years before had been dispersed like sheep without a shepherd appeared now so happy and recollected. When the service began every one joined in singing Faber's beautiful hymns in such sweet and animated tones, which contrasted with the solemn coldness of the other English Catholic chapels. Benediction followed according to the Roman rite down to the minutest detail, so that one might have believed oneself in Italy rather than in London ; all this was quite a surprise to me." Mother Marie Eugénie then comments on Fr. Faber's preaching, which she found cold. " But " she adds, " it must be said that he is in bad health. All that I have come across so far in English ways suits me much better than I expected. To my great surprise, I have found English people display, without any exception, in their own country a politeness which contrasts with the want of it with which they are reproached on the Continent. English women seem to be on a footing with men which justifies them in expecting to be assisted on all occasions by them without requiring thanks, and I noticed that I was guilty of a want of sense of the proprieties, almost, when I put myself to any inconvenience for them, even in a public coach. But this is only a minor affair ; what is more important is the pervading spirit of respect which is observable

everywhere in all relations of life. I am also enchanted with the goodness and simplicity of the priests with whom I have been brought in contact. Fr. Johnson, the parish priest of this town, is really excellent."

The Mother General was only able to spare a month to her daughters at Richmond. Her departure was felt very much by them; it also coincided with the death of Mr Maxwell, of whom the *Origines* remark that he was a most sure and disinterested friend to the community who depended upon him for advice. He was carried off after a short illness, his death being a cause of mourning to all the country-side. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel in a letter to the Mother General remarks: "Since the very unexpected death of Mr Maxwell, which I felt very deeply—for I loved him indeed, in our Lord—these words of our Rule seem to be always sounding in my ears: 'Let the Sisters remember that it is not by temporal means that their houses will be maintained, but by their faith, and perfection and confidence in God alone, and by their applying themselves to the effort never to say, or do, anything that could not have been done or said by our Lord or His Blessed Mother.'"

Assumption Convent, Sidmouth.

Nuns' Choir, Sidmouth.

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CHAPTER XIX

Je crois que la souffrance a eté accordée par Dieu à l'homme dans une grande pensée d'amour et de miséricorde.

THÉRÈSE LESUEUR.

THE month of May 1851 seems to have brought special graces to Mother Marie Eugénie, though, like many others, not unaccompanied with the Cross. She speaks of them thus in a letter to the Superior at Richmond: "I received the grace of so great an increase of devotion to the Blessed Virgin during the month of May that it has filled me with joy. I think of it all day long, and I feel a tenderness of affection for her greater than I have ever been sensible of before. I have experienced her extreme goodness with regard to the favour I had asked of her for this month of May: that is of peace and calm in place of the distress of mind of which I complained to you; and I find myself so strengthened inwardly that I cannot sufficiently thank her for it. Notice that she is for us what St Teresa is for her daughters; that is the Mother of our Congregation, in addition to being the Mother of all Christians. I have had lately a feeling towards her which lightens immeasurably the weight of my office; and it seems to me that she has raised my heart to a state of holy charity during this month of May which will henceforward banish my past troubles. I feel I owe to the Blessed Virgin the peace in which I now find myself."

A month later the Mother was to pass through a trial which was to put this peace and tranquillity to a severe test; and we cannot doubt that they had been given to her as a preparation for it. Her uncle, M. de Franchessin, to whom she was tenderly attached, and

who had ever been a firm friend of the Congregation—helping it substantially as well as by his advice and support on numerous occasions—was attacked with pneumonia. The fluctuations from hope to despair, usual to that complaint, succeeded one another; but before long it was obvious that his last hour had come. He had not lost his faith; for Mother Marie Eugénie, in describing his state, said that he had asked the Sister who was nursing him to pray for him, and had accepted gratefully a medal of our Lady. He had also promised to make his Communion at the shrine of Notre Dame des Victoires in the event of his recovery. The danger at last became imminent. M. Gabriel, with whom he had always been on very friendly terms, told him that he had no time to lose if he wished to make his peace with God; and adjured him in the name of those he loved, his mother in heaven and of Mother Marie Eugénie who never ceased praying for him, to return to the Church. He consented and made his confession. M. Gabriel then left him, quite satisfied with his penitent's dispositions, and told him he would return with the Blessed Sacrament next day. The rest we will give in Mother Marie Eugénie's words writing to the Superior at Richmond. "At one in the morning, M. de Franchessin roused every one up and sent for M. Gabriel and then received our Lord with visible devotion. He was only just in time, because though he preserved consciousness up to the end, the pains of suffocation would have made it very difficult for him to do well later what he then did, had he put it off longer. I need not tell you how sad I am; you will understand it. I miss you much under these circumstances. I try to make my sacrifice as generously as possible; but the last sufferings of this devoted friend, his condition before God, his desire to live, and a thousand other things connected with him are always before my eyes."

Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's answer must have

brought much consolation to her holy Superior. After reminding her of the graces her uncle had received in his last moments so that she might confidently trust to meet him again in a blissful eternity, she continues: "From the moment I heard of his illness, I prayed incessantly for him, representing to our Lord—as St Catherine of Siena did—His Passion and His Cross. Whilst I was doing the same at Benediction, I was rapt in prayer, and I received the sight and impression of God as an abyss of mercy with these words sounding in my ears: *Fons misericordiæ*. It was, as it were, an inexhaustible eternal source in whose waters all the elect have bathed—it was majestic, infinite. . . . I have not been able, for the last three days, to say anything but *Jesu, misericordia mea!* and *Mater Misericordiæ* to invoke the Blessed Virgin. Every moment seemed so precious, in order to gain these waters of great price for the soul of our friend and benefactor. I have begged our Sisters to say often *Jesu Misericordia mea* and *Mater misericordiæ*, telling them that all our trust is in the mercy of God which saved the good thief in his last hour."

The well-being and sanctification of the little community at Richmond were much in the Mother General's thoughts in these early days of its foundation, as we learn from her correspondence. At the beginning of the year 1852, she sent them a collective letter addressed to the whole community, in which, after thanking them for each of theirs, she continues: "Let us think what virtue you should renew your efforts to practise, and in which to become more perfect in the coming year, and also what I should wish for you above all others to acquire.

"For the first of these questions let each one of you make your resolutions, and then at the end of a month, tell me how you have kept them. As regards the second, you will readily understand that I wish for you all a close union with our Saviour, from whom proceeds

every virtue, grace, and progress. But as the special fruit of this union and the means to attain to it, I am going to wish you a very humble and little virtue which you will be able to make use of at every moment and which will give you as much joy as peace if you practise it faithfully. Do you guess it, my dear daughters ? Truly I know not why our good God impels me to wish it you amongst so many other virtues for I am quite sure you are not devoid of it ; but after all there is always something more to be gained. It is the love of your abjection. If you do not all of you fully understand the meaning of this, your dear Mother will explain it to you ; she will find in the writings of great St Francis de Sales charming things said of this virtue, of which my mistress of novices used to tell me formerly that it should be as inseparable from a nun as her shadow. Your Mother will tell you all the fruits of charity, sweetness and perfect submission which are found in it. And then, when we meet again in our dear little solitude of the Priory of our Lady, you will have made so much progress in it that you will have become the most humble and compliant of beings."

A Foundation at Sedan under the benevolent auspices of Cardinal Gousset, which had been contemplated at the same time as that of the Cape of Good Hope and Richmond in 1849, began to materialise in 1853. A few words about Cardinal Gousset's previous career may not be out of place here. What Veuillot said of Gousset and his mission are worth quoting in this context. " The Jansenists with their despairing rigorism had found their way into our Catholic schools ; they had succeeded with the help of their Protestant allies in loosening—if not breaking —the close ties which had ever united France with Rome. The need then became urgent of bringing us back to the pure and sane morality of the Gospel, giving us back the sweet and light yoke of Christ, and

making us pass over the mountains in order to reunite us to the See of Peter. Well! the Abbé Gousset will be equal to accomplishing this divine task; his rare courage will enable him to undertake it, and he will have the deserved happiness of succeeding in it." Gousset had been ten years a professor when he came across the *Moral Theology of St Alphonsus Liguori*. He was so much impressed by it that it was a turning-point in his life. He started for Rome to put himself at the service of Pius VIII, who welcomed him with open arms. After his audience with the Pope, he visited the Confession of St Peter, and there dedicated his life by vow to the defence of St Alfonso's teaching, of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and of the supremacy of the Vicar of Christ. He then returned to France, and in 1836 he was made Bishop of Périgueux. It was here that he first came across M. Combalot, whose ideas coincided so closely with his own that he not only advised the de Commarque family to entrust their daughter to the Congregation of the Assumption (then in course of establishment), but he ever afterwards manifested a warm interest in the growth and development of that institute. In 1840 he was promoted to the archiepiscopal See of Rheims. His persistent and—in the end—successful efforts to promote a closer union with the Mother of Churches, dates from this period. Rheims, like nearly all the dioceses in France, had its own local ceremonies, its rubrics and even its special liturgies—the results of the isolation of the bishops and their infrequent communication with Rome. Gousset, before many years had elapsed, re-established the Roman rite throughout his diocese, and his example was followed in the course of time by all the others, so that owing to the impulse given first by Dom Guéranger and afterwards backed by the Archbishop of Rheims, all the churches in France had renounced their particular liturgies. In 1851 Gousset was made a Cardinal.

It was in the summer of 1853 that Cardinal Gousset, in an interview with the Mother General, revived the idea of a Foundation of the Assumption at Sedan. Mention was made in the *Annales* that "on the 13th of July 1853, our Mother being ill, received the Cardinal in the infirmary. All was concluded between them for the Foundation."

The Mother General was suffering at that time from a long and troublesome complaint which necessitated an operation; accordingly she entrusted to Mother Thérèse Emmanuel the care of settling on a house at Sedan, to be occupied at least provisionally by the nuns of the Assumption. It would appear from a letter written by the former to Fr. d'Alzon ten months later that there were many objections to the house, the greatest being the absence of a garden. After mentioning them she says: "I try to look at the most hopeful side of things—one of which is that there is an impossibility, almost, of getting a house at Sedan, as the town is so closely hemmed in; this one is large and will always retain its value. We can establish ourselves here at small cost for the first few years, during which time we can make acquaintance with the inhabitants, attract children for the school, and find outside the gates of the town, or in the Faubourg de Forcy, a large piece of ground, build there and transport ourselves thither as soon as it is made habitable, and sell this house." She ends by saying: "We are staying with the Sisters of Charity; you know I always love to make friends with them wherever we are. Farewell, my dear Father; I pray a great deal for you and your Assumptionists, the burden of whom I feel is what most weighs you down. Let us unite in saying 'our good God will provide.' The more confidence we have in Him, the less He will allow us to be deceived."

The Curé of Sedan was delighted with the prospect of the nuns of the Assumption settling at Sedan, and

did all he could to hasten their arrival; and with this view he announced to every one that the school would be opened in October. Preparations were therefore hurried on, and Sister Marie Thérèse and Sister Marie Bernard were sent first to make the house habitable. Within a few days of their arrival, there was an outbreak of cholera in the town. Sister Marie Thérèse announces the fact to the Superior General in the following letter: "Cholera has declared itself here, my very dear Mother, and already four persons have died of it. Those who are attacked with it are not to be taken to the hospital, but to ambulances where nuns will be asked to nurse them. If you will give me permission, I should like to offer my services. You know I am not afraid of infection; and though nursing is not one of the ends for which the Congregation was instituted, does it not appear to you that in a time of cholera which almost resembles the plague, we might devote ourselves to it? Did not the nuns in the early days of the Visitation nurse the plague-stricken at Lyons? I need not, however, tell you, my dear Mother, that in this matter as in all others, I only wish to do whatever you wish, and what appears to you to be for the best."

The Mother General took a little while to consult others, including a doctor in whom she had much confidence, before answering, and two days later, accordingly, the same Sister writes begging for an immediate reply: "I thought as we were not leading a community life, I might make this request; also I must tell you that my first impulse before I had time to reflect, was to offer myself to the Curé, who first told us about the cholera and the measures which were taken against it. I must also say that he seemed enchanted with my offer, and said: 'What! would you go to the ambulance: and there was I thinking that you would want to go straight back to Paris!' You cannot form an idea of the terror that the appear-

ance of cholera has produced here ; I can assure you, however, that M. Nanquette has shown himself not only a pastor but a courageous and devoted one. But the one who is the most to be admired is Sister Félicité. She does not give herself a moment's rest ; she nurses the cholera patients without any assistance, not wishing to take any of her Sisters with her on account of the risk of contagion. She persuaded all the poor people who died of it to receive the Last Sacraments, and they all made a good end. As soon as she gets back she is sent for to attend a fresh case ; and it is touching to see how she simply kneels down, says a Hail Mary, and starts off again. In a time of epidemic, works of mercy are indeed beautiful to behold ! People wished to send the cholera patients to the hospital ; but the doctor forbade it on account of the old men and children. Nearly all those who were seized with it have died. Happily there were not a great number of them."

The Mother General in her reply says that she wished to reflect and consult others before giving a decided answer. Notwithstanding her anxiety for her daughter, she continues : " I cannot, in conscience refuse permission to you to nurse the sick ; on the contrary, I praise and encourage you in the performance of this good work ; but I attach three conditions to it which M. Gouraud says, if complied with, should reassure me as to your safety. (1) At the smallest sign of indisposition you should stop and attend to your health. (2) You should take plenty of food, and avoid, in nursing the sick, breathing their breath. (3) You should be out in the fresh air daily, and not sleep in infected rooms. I pray our Lord and His Blessed Mother to guide and watch over you in this mission, which will draw many graces down upon you."

For the moment the epidemic had diminished, but shortly afterwards Sister Marie Thérèse announces a recrudescence. She writes that they had had some

appallingly rapid deaths: "On Friday three men died at the ambulance in the course of a few hours. One of them was all right at five in the afternoon; at six he was taken ill, but was able to walk to the ambulance, and at ten it was all over. The day before, he had been nursing some cholera patients in a house where there had been five or six down with it. We have lost our poor infirmarian, after less than two days' illness."

The scourge having ceased, and the repairs to the house having been concluded, Sister Marie Thérèse returned to Paris. On her way she stopped at Rheims, where she was warmly welcomed as an old friend and parishioner by Cardinal Gousset, who remembered her as Josephine de Commarque in the days when he occupied the See of Périgueux. Mother Marie Eugénie observes in one of her letters: "Sister Marie Thérèse has returned. The Cardinal showed himself most kindly disposed both to her and to us. He thanked her warmly for her care of the cholera patients, and seemed very pleased with everything."

The house at Sedan was opened at the beginning of October by the Abbé Nanquette, assisted by five other priests, with much pomp and ceremony. The Mayor and his deputy were present, and told the Superior afterwards how pleased they were to have the nuns of the Assumption at Sedan. The poverty the Community suffered from the beginning was as great as in the other Foundations; but they only rejoiced at it, feeling sure that it would bring a blessing on the work. Mother Marie Eugénie had sent them the book of the Foundations of St Teresa to read; and one of the Sisters when thanking her for it says: "It has done us a great deal of good; only that it makes us commit sins of envy, seeing how little we resemble those early Daughters of Carmel who did so much for God in their Foundations. If only our Lord could say of us what He did to St Teresa of St Joseph's

of Avila, that it was His paradise of delights! That is the summit of our ambitions."

They did not keep the excellent Abbé Nanquette long as a spiritual Father and devoted friend. The following year he was made Bishop of Mans, but his successor, M. Tourneur, inherited from him his kind interest in the convent and school of the Assumption. The influence of these was felt beyond the limits of Sedan; and a priest from the Ardennes writing about it later on said that "it was a source of supernatural life for the whole neighbourhood; many true Christians have been formed there, souls animated by faith and a sense of duty who have taken this spirit back to their families and been productive of solid good. A new life was infused into the society of Sedan by the Assumption."

Whilst these events were going on outside the walls of Chaillot, there was a great mourning inside it for the death of Sister Marie Rose, who had endeared herself greatly to the community in her short life of twenty-four years. Sister Marie Rose entered the noviciate at the age of twenty-one, and was noted whilst a novice for her fervour and piety; when professed she took for the motto on her ring: "I wish to know Jesus only and Him crucified"; and before long her prayer was heard, for she was attacked with a long and painful illness, which lasted till her death. In the last year of her life, her union with her Divine Spouse was so complete that she asked and obtained permission from M. Gay, who had succeeded M. Gabriel as confessor to the community, to make a vow always to do whatever was most perfect. We read in the *Origines* that her joy was great at being allowed to pronounce this vow, and it cost her no anxiety of mind to keep it; her will was so closely united to God's that she seemed to have no thought or desire apart from it. Mother Marie Eugénie speaks of her thus in one of her letters: "I often went to speak to her about God, as it gave her

great pleasure, and on one occasion I asked her if she was suffering a great deal. She answered: 'By dint of loving suffering, one ends by not feeling it.' She never ceased offering her life for the good of the Church and for the souls of men. Her mother came to see her a short time before her death. She had another daughter who was also on the point of death, and representing to Sister Marie Rose what her anguish would be at losing two children at the same time, she begged of her to ask her cure of God. 'How is it possible that I should ask anything of God except that His Will should be done?' was her answer. Then, after a moment's pause, she added: 'Do not fear, God will console you.' A few days later she gave up her soul to God at the same moment that the nuns were singing in the choir the hymn of St Juliana Falconieri: *Cœlestis Agni nuptias*. One of the out-Sisters was sent at once to Sister Marie Rose's mother to break the news of her daughter's death to her. She answered: 'I know what you have come to tell me; my daughter is dead. I went to the Abbaye aux Bois for vespers, and whilst I was praying I saw a number of angels in a dazzling light descending into the sanctuary and then I saw my daughter in their arms and they bore her up to heaven.' Thus did our Lord enable this holy soul to keep her promise to her mother."

The Congregation of the Assumption had in 1854 lasted fifteen years; and Mother Marie Eugénie, acting under the advice of her counsellors, began in that year to take measures to have it approved of by the Holy See. Three steps have to be taken before Rome formally sanctions a religious Order. The first thing to be done is to have a historical account of its origin drawn up; the precise objects it aims at; its actual state, and its rules and constitutions. If these are considered satisfactory, the Holy See issues a

"laudative" brief, or letter. Again, later the constitutions have to be submitted to criticisms, sometimes to corrections, should the statutes require them; after they have passed successfully through this stage, the Congregation receives a letter of approbation. In giving the latter, Rome demands that there should be a time of probation given to the working of the proposed constitutions, as guarantee that no subsequent changes will be required. At the end of the prescribed period the Holy See issues a brief confirming the Rule.

Cardinal Gousset undertook to present Mother Marie Eugénie's petition (signed also by her assistant Sister Thérèse Emmanuel) to the Holy See; and it was seconded by the Archbishop of Paris and several other dignitaries of the Church. The Abbé Gay, who was in Rome when it was granted six months later, wrote the following letter to the Mother General, when forwarding to her the "laudative" letter: "This little parchment encloses great things; on account of it graces will be poured down on all your daughters, and, first of all on their Mother, because all is done, according to St Paul, in order. Be first in virtue as you are in authority. The ardent desire of the Heart of Jesus is that the sanctity of men should correspond with their dignity, and He bestows graces at the same time that He imposes duties."

CHAPTER XX

"Blessed is the man whose help is from thee: in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps." (Ps. lxxxiii. 6.)

THESE words of Holy Writ might be taken as a history in brief of Mother Marie Eugénie's inner life. And as the life of the soul is of incomparably greater value than the outer and bodily one, we propose, before continuing the history of the development of her Congregation, to trace this spiritual ascent in the soul of the Foundress.

In an account she gives to her director of her retreat in 1850 she speaks of a trial of spiritual aridity. "But," she adds, "though He does not speak to me, I have much to say to Him. I never tire of knocking at the door of His mercy; of representing to Him that it is He who converts souls; of reminding Him of all He has done for His saints, whom, in one day, He has raised up to a sovereign love of Him. I ask for the virtues which please Him; I look out for means by which to remain a great deal in His presence, for being faithful to the Holy Ghost, and allowing myself to be guided in all things by Him. And since I cannot count much on my best efforts I come back to reliance on the love and mercy of God and to asking all things from them. . . . But what makes me take confidence that God is working in me is that the more I see my vileness and misery, the more joy this knowledge brings me when in His presence. The summing up is that I should wish all creatures should behold me in the same light; I hope this will come. God wills that my heart should further expand, but that it should do so, it seems to me, precisely in the spirit of sacrifice. I

shall soon have employed thirty-three years in self-seeking. If I could in approaching this term (which recalls to me the death of Jesus Christ) take the line, once for all, of acquiring the spirit of victim in order to do penance for the past! If I could only make use of the feelings of my heart—of all within me that is most sensitive and delicate—in divining and anticipating those of my neighbour, and never henceforth seek satisfaction for myself, or consider feelings when it is question of my own! I wish often to recall these words by which I have been much struck: 'In that moment in which we begin to seek our own satisfaction we cease to love.' If I could only, therefore, fix my abode in the love of God and of my neighbour, and in forgetfulness of self, I shall have gained a great deal in this retreat. . . . I read a little while ago that St Rose of Lima spent three hours daily in giving thanks to God for His benefits, and above all for His love. This prayer would often be the easiest for me to make, and it does me much good in raising me from a state of depression, and making me emerge from it ready to be kind and tender to others, in the same way that God condescends to be to me. Everything may be wanting to me; He alone will not be wanting. I like to tell Him this, also to say, 'If I am in the shadow of death I will still hope in Thee.' I want support: God is the All-powerful, *that* is the true support of my soul."

In a retreat in the year following (1851) we find: "To-day, the 5th of March, I have made the Stations of the Cross, and it seems to me that God spoke to me more openly, and that He pierced my heart so that it was made to bleed and shed tears over its pride. O my God! why is it that with me it is always a question of self: whether people are, or will be, good to me. Shall I never be able to establish myself in a true state of self-contempt, which will tend to make me lose my desire for the consideration of others instead of trying

to preserve it; of putting myself under every one's feet; of being willingly contradicted and despised; and of fearing one thing alone—which is the bad example I give, for which I am bound to make reparation?

"I feel that the resolutions which I make in this retreat should be aimed at preserving my peace: (1) By very humble dispositions of mind, great care and courage in humbling myself in order to repair my faults. (2) By a mortification and stripping of myself in all things, and of personal wills and wishes; by a heartfelt acceptation of contradictions, in particular of such as proceed from the character of others, and the mortification of a strict regularity for the sake of example. (3) By recollection; by the sight of God; and of a practice of as unbroken prayer as possible; and the effort needed of allowing Jesus Christ to live in me.

"I see that God wishes to conduct me to greater perfection: that of being united in a spirit of victim with Jesus Christ; to fidelity in only seeing my neighbours' faults and defects in order that I may do penance for them; of depending on Jesus Christ in all my actions; of belonging utterly to Him for the sake of souls, and of living by His prayer, His sacrifice and His thoughts. And as the human heart will have its joy to take mine in Him."

On the 2nd of December of the same year she writes thus to her director: "God asks of me, whenever a great trial happens to me, to keep silence till I am able to put the matter straight before Him, so as to find out how He wishes me to take it, making at the same time an act of self-abnegation and in exterior things, having no aim but His glory and the increase of His love in my heart."

Early in the following year, 1852, she writes: "I have just been praying, and the thought entered very deeply into my soul that I should make a return to

our Lord for His friendship and believe in His tenderness. He has loved me, He has chosen me, I came from Him, I go to Him; and all my weaknesses and vacillations are tending to nothing else but to the final great failing when, issuing from my little being I shall fall wholly into Him. I came here only in order to find Him; and I find in prayer the end of my life. What folly to look for anything else. . . . These thoughts have done me good, and I have felt that in order to make progress, and cease falling, I should no longer say to God that I wished to serve Him perfectly, but that I wished to love Him perfectly. Already I have felt inclined, in the last few days, to put myself in the spirit of a sweet and earnest dependence through love." A few months later she writes: (Holy Week, 1853):

"It appears to me that God, who is able in one moment to clothe a beggar, has put a new feeling into me. In future, whatever happens to me, whether it is my work, or in encountering contempt or difficulties, whether I do, or do not succeed, all such things will appear to me from a different point of view, *Propter Jesum*—on account of Jesus. It appears to me—this is very bold—that I no longer am in need of creatures, and that I shall love them all the better for it; for all I long for is that they should love Jesus Christ. Finally, the thought of loving Him not for my sake but for His, of working for Him, the thought that so few, even amongst His own, loved Him at the time of His passion, and that He suffered from this; these thoughts penetrated my soul to its very depths in a manner that I had never felt before. . . . I think I have never before had purer or more sincere desires, or been more desirous of good. I have sometimes had more ambitious ones; that is I have aimed at higher things, but I look now only to fulfilling my duties as well as I can; to trying to be a good religious, a good superior, and—as the first Mother—to work at

making everything as holy as possible in the Congregation ; but to work resolutely to this end."

It is noteworthy that not on one occasion only, but in many, the holy Superior seems to have had a foreshadowing of the trial which awaited her in the closing years of her life, and to have had the grace to welcome it as an added favour and mercy. Thus she writes in the month of May of this year : " Our Lord made me feel so vivid a love for Him during the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, that I could scarcely contain it. I have several times lately felt this personal love, if I may so call it. What moves me more than anything is the expectation of the happy moment when He will change my life of Martha for that of Mary, though I only expect this great and longed-for good at the door of heaven. But I realise so strongly that Jesus Christ—and Jesus in the holy Eucharist—suffices to my happiness on earth, that I cannot comprehend how I do not tear myself away from everything in order to pray more." A little later (12th August), she puts the same thought in the form of a resolution : " I propose in becoming older to become very good and to be so to every one and in everything."

The author of the *Origines* remarks that the state of helplessness and humiliation in which God saw fit to place the holy Foundress in the last few years of her life was one which she had unceasingly asked of Him. It was the pledge of her hopes, the consummation of graces received, the desired crowning of a life of labour and sacrifice.

Her thoughts for the New Year (1854) take the same line : " God wills that all should fall round me ; that I should have to abandon a number of things. I seem to perceive a future awaiting me in which I shall be stripped of all things, a state where the only thing left to me would be charity." Again we find : " I am ready to face a death accompanied with infirmity and constant helplessness without any repug-

nance." She felt that to be deprived of the solace of human sympathy and consideration would be more than compensated for by a closer union with her Divine Spouse: "Thus if I came to be less appreciated by creatures they would leave me freer to go to Jesus and to hold intercourse with Him in the tabernacle, to have Him and Him only; this would be no small gain. My God, this is all I have longed for in the religious life; and it was with this object only that I came here. To be of no account would be a good method of attaining to this end. How is it then that I am mixed up in so many perishable works instead of 'the one thing necessary,' which, after all, my soul pines for more than for all the rest?"

In a manifestation of her conscience to her director in her annual retreat the holy Foundress complains of being very wanting in fervour and energy. "I wish I could find in myself an effective will to follow Jesus Christ in suffering and in humiliations, not for the credit of accepting them, but out of love of sharing them with Him. I do not desire to fill my soul with what would be a source of support, but to strip myself, to impoverish myself, to give myself up, to annihilate myself, for this reason I have not taken a book for my retreat, which would engross me too much. I do better, I believe, in going to listen to our Lord in my own soul and in the Blessed Sacrament. . . . I see that I have only one faculty which is well developed in God's service, and that is obedience. I have nothing to give, I can do nothing of myself, but I have something firmly ingrained in me which makes me feel that the Will of God is my sovereign guide and master; this is the domain, the right of God which I am never tempted to ignore. My soul is not magnanimous enough to go in advance of His wishes, but it is too Christian for me not to obey when God has spoken. In conclusion, therefore, I see that Jesus should reign in me, and that I should study how to obey Him.

This brings me to the obedience which I owe you, Father, and I pray you to make use of it for God. If from want of interior fidelity and recollection I do not grasp our Lord's wishes, do you make me see them from the outward point of view. I ask your pardon if in spite of the strong attraction I feel to perfect obedience I do not put it into practice in all its details as I should, and to help me to submit to God in all things."

On the 16th of February 1856 she again writes to Fr. d'Alzon: "I have lately had moments of deep depression, such as I always get when I am forced to occupy myself with business matters. A little solitude and liberty of spirit bring me so much light and joy and good thoughts that I cannot comprehend how it is that in God's designs for me my life should be taken up by such a multiplicity of different objects. At least it is something to know whence comes the evil. . . . I shall in future torment myself less about it, and I shall have at least the prospect of finishing in peace when my forces are spent." Fr. d'Alzon answers as follows: "Alas, my dear child, who understands better than I do all the trials and business worries which one has to struggle with, and the aridity which this exterior dust leaves upon one's soul? But this is no reason to refuse to trace the furrow which God marks out to us. He is there; He knows the effort we have to make. He replaces the sweetness of His service with the strength necessary for serving Him better. Take such means as you can to find more time for prayer. This is an essential point, and God asks it of you." In another letter he remarks: "I thoroughly understand what you say about your Martha-like eagerness. It is the misfortune of superiors; they are preoccupied with business, and not occupied enough with themselves. You must make efforts to find time for prayer. It is in prayer that your soul will make progress in sweetness, in

pliability, in possessing itself for God, and in fortifying itself in charity for its neighbour." Mother Marie Eugénie's answer was in full accordance with the above. "I am ever more and more persuaded that all is done in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament," she writes, "that the greatest of all means of doing works for God is that of praying a great deal, of having a pure intention, of not acting according to nature but in following God's will. And in order to do this, to mistrust one's natural impulses, to despise oneself and to exercise great charity, and to be firm and faithful in necessary matters.

I pray hard for the two Assumptions that God will put His spirit into them, and give us all the regularity in outward forms, and the fervour, obedience and religious habits by which the Congregations should live."

After the soul the body: in order not to interrupt the sequence of events, especially those connected with Mother Marie Eugénie's interior life, we have omitted all mention of a serious illness she had in the winter of 1853–4. This illness was a result of a fall she had had as a child when playing with her brother Louis at Preisch. She had suffered a good deal at the time from the accident, and slightly, at intervals, from it ever afterwards. In the year 1853 a severe blow from a door which had been allowed, accidentally, to close on her, and which struck her on the weak spot caused inflammation and suppuration to be set up. The usual remedies were tried unsuccessfully: finally, surgeons were called in, who, after careful examination pronounced a deep-seated abscess to be the cause of the trouble.

In answer to a letter written to ask for his prayers Fr. d'Alzon answers: "I have only a moment to spare, my very dear child; but I must tell you how much I shall pray for you and how many prayers I shall get

for you, that God may cause you to draw great profit and great sanctity from all your pains and sufferings. God places you on the altar, my dear daughter; evidently He wishes you to become altogether saintly, for suffering is a very bitter trial to our poor nature. Sin, which condemns us to such expiations, must indeed be a terrible thing. I put you under the protection of the Queen of Martyrs, in order that she may proportion your courage to what you have to endure."

The operation was postponed; and meanwhile some relics of the Forty Martyrs of China who had been lately canonised were presented to the community, and the Sisters at once began a novena to the martyrs which was timed so that it should end on the day which was fixed upon for the operation. The celebrated surgeon Nélaton was to operate. He had diagnosed the evil the previous day, and all was in readiness when he discovered that the symptons which showed the presence of pus had disappeared. Accordingly he pronounced an operation to be unnecessary. Though not a first-class miracle (as the incredulous might be able to urge that the doctors were mistaken), it was certainly a *grazia* of the most striking kind. The Community hailed it as such, and made a novena of thanksgiving to the glorious martyrs to whose intercession they felt they were indebted for their Mother General's cure.

Though from that moment her health improved, and she was able after a time to resume her ordinary life, Mother Marie Eugénie was never completely cured, nor was she ever free from pain, which any unusual exertion increased. Her patience under this trial was unfailing; she never complained or made any difference in her habits, and continued to sleep like the rest of the community on a straw palliasse.

Never was her well-being more important to the Congregation than in the years that followed; she

was asked in all directions to make fresh Foundations. The one at Sedan was quickly followed by another at Nîmes. Fr. d'Alzon had begun as early as the year 1852 to urge his bishop, Mgr Cart, to consent to the establishment of nuns of the Assumption in his diocese; but the Bishop's answer had invariably been that already Fr. d'Alzon was weighed down by the good works he had undertaken, and he refused to allow his zealous Vicar-General to add to their number.

Fr. d'Alzon describes a conversation he had had with Mgr Cart in a latter to Mother Marie Eugénie dated 31st October 1852: "All the answer I could get from him was, 'You undertake too much; you cannot suffice for all you have got on your hands, and what would happen supposing you broke down?' We must therefore wait. . . . Let us not, however, renounce our project. I waited four years before I got the Carmelites to come here, and I would wait eight to get your nuns. Still, I should be very pleased if they were able to come sooner." Fr. d'Alzon's object in getting a community of the Assumption at Nîmes was to make them a centre for other good works which he had started there. Amongst these was a Third Order of women of that Congregation, one for retreats, the Oeuvre des Tabernacles (as Altar Societies were then called) and another more especially dedicated to the work of establishing Perpetual Adoration. If for the moment the Foundation at Nîmes had to be abandoned, it was much in the Mother General's thoughts in the years that followed; she saw an indication of the favouring hand of Providence in the circumstance that postulants presented themselves with the express desire of devoting their lives to the work of Perpetual Adoration, rather than to that of education. Writing in the year 1854 to Fr. d'Alzon on the subject of these new-comers, some of whom were penitents of his, she remarks: "I suppose they will not make it a condition to be

sent to such or such houses. I, on my side, should be quite willing to employ them in the foundation of Nîmes if they have the necessary qualifications for it; and I should not make use of them there, or elsewhere, to teach, since God has not called them to it. We have plenty of work for souls given to prayer, who are ready for humble hidden work, and for working for the good of the souls whom God sends us: for instance, in poor schools, retreats, the instruction of Protestants, and so forth. We have Sisters whom on account of their having no turn for teaching we have never employed in our schools; but if a Sister boasted of this exemption as of a right it would be a cause of scandal in the Congregation."

Fr. d'Alzon had not long to wait before his hopes were realised. In the year 1854 his Bishop was attacked with a severe lingering illness, during which time he confided the entire care of his diocese to his Vicar-General, and left him at liberty to carry out his intentions respecting the proposed Foundation. Fr. d'Alzon, however, did not avail himself of this authorization; nor did he do so when after Mgr Cart's death in August 1855 he was appointed Vicar Capitular. Six months passed, during which time Fr. d'Alzon's appointment to the vacant See was looked upon as a foregone conclusion by those who were not aware of the vow he had made which precluded his acceptance of it. At the end of that time the Abbé Plantier of Lyons, a priest of great holiness of life, and an eloquent preacher, was appointed Bishop of Nîmes; and even before taking possession of his See he began negotiations with Mother Marie Eugénie for the Foundation. It took place on the 21st of October 1855. The house which had been hired for the nuns not being in readiness, they (three in number) were hospitably entertained for the first fortnight by the grandmother of Sister Marie Elisabeth, Mme de Lisleroy, whose joy was great at having her nun-grandchild under her roof. The

house resembled a convent, we are told; and Sister Marie Elisabeth writes: "My dear grandmother sees that we make all our prayers in common. It was in vain I told her that we said prime and compline to ourselves; the only result was to shock her! She made us also use one of her old-fashioned books for our meditation. Sister Marie Walburge reads, and at every point the dear good grandmother gives a little knock on the table to make us stop and meditate. I admired Sister Marie Walburge's gravity the while; not a smile was visible on her face."

Poverty of the most absolute description reigned in the little house of which the community took possession on the 9th of November. Four more nuns joined them from Paris, and the opening ceremony was performed by Fr. d'Alzon, who commented eloquently in his sermon on the text taken from the Office of the day: "*Lapides pretiosi omnes muri tui, et turres Jerusalem gemmis ædificabuntur.*" After Mass the Blessed Sacrament was exposed; but as there was no canopy the monstrance had to be put on the altar. The hours for watching were distributed amongst the members of the community, and the work of Perpetual Adoration was founded. A Sister describing the situation wrote: "The installation was easily done, as we had no furniture. The Carmelites presented us with a dozen wooden chairs which could not have arrived more opportunely. They had to serve for the chapel, the community room and the refectory; and each nun carried her chair about with her." Fr. d'Alzon, as we are told, and might easily surmise, was the visible Providence of the community. On one occasion, after the winter had begun, he inquired from a lay Sister whether the nuns suffered from the cold. She answered that one of them did, but the others got on all right. He made no remark, but the same evening Fr. Brun appeared loaded with woollen blankets. Needless to describe the joy and gratitude

of the Sisters. "We had," we learn from the same narrator, "a tiny garden bordered with little walks edged with box, which were so narrow that two persons could not walk abreast in them. We kept some hens there which had been given to us; they constituted our great riches. Every morning the *économe* had the joy of going and searching for eggs in the miserable hen-loft or in a broken-down shed. Our garden produced some bad figs and some lovely roses." The latter were put to use for the decoration of the altar.

Fr. d'Alzon wrote as follows to the Mother General about the community: "The spirit of poverty of your daughters produces a marvellous effect. I should encourage them to persevere in it, as there can be no doubt that God will reward it with great graces of conversion. Mother Marie Walburge succeeds a thousand times better than I should have dared to hope. It would be impossible to find a more obedient religious, one more faithful to the Rule, more anxious to do at Nîmes what is done in Paris, in the spirit in which it is done, and as you would wish it done. She is admirable in these respects."

Amongst the postulants who asked for admission in the year 1856 was Françoise Eugénie de Malbosc. She left a memory behind her of great piety and close union with God, and her interior life shining through a strikingly original character inspired the charming biography written of her by Mgr de Cabrières, Bishop of Montpellier. She succeeded Mother Marie Walburge after two years as second superior of the convent at Nîmes.

Before a year had elapsed, at Fr. d'Alzon's especial request a school was started. It was largely patronised, the result being that in the year 1857 the community had to migrate to the country in the immediate vicinity of Nîmes, where they built both a monastery and school, and ultimately a beautiful church.

CHAPTER XXI

"If all loved and were loved in return, we should no longer harm one another; all evils would cease; sin as well as vice would be unknown to us." (St John Chrysostom.)

On no occasion were Mother Marie Eugénie's gifts as counsellor and consoler called more into requisition in her director's behalf than in the year 1856. It is said that worry kills ten men for one that dies of work; and a great anxiety came upon Fr. d'Alzon at this period in addition to his ever increasing burden of work. It was with regard to the future of his college, his Benjamin, which of all his undertakings was nearest his heart. The college had ceased to pay, and was beginning to pile up a debt which he saw no prospect of being able to meet. There were other circumstances too, into which it is unnecessary to enter, which made the trial a grievous one for him to bear. It is to these matters Mother Marie Eugénie alludes in the following letter: "I know of course that being a man you do not shed tears; but the heart weeps too, and so many things coming together cannot fail to have saddened it deeply. Let me tell you how much I feel for you, and how I pray God to sanctify and support you in proportion to your trials. Believe that a heart exists which is always devoted to you, and which takes part in all that affects you: it is that of your daughter, miserable though it is."

The end—foreseen as it had been for some time—came at last; and Fr. d'Alzon wrote to announce to his penitent that the college was about to be closed. She answered as follows: "I thank you, my dear Father, for giving me the first intimation of a sacrifice of which I realise the full cost to you, but which will, I believe, one day bear fruit of consolation. I feel

Assumption Convent, Auteuil.

convinced that this loss will be a gain for the religious foundation. A strengthened Congregation will one day return to take possession of the ground upon which its first efforts were expended. It will be again a case of the 'grain of wheat.' I believe firmly that all that has happened to you for the last few years is nothing else but a fulfilment of that word of our Lord."

Though Fr. d'Alzon's patience and resignation to the Divine Will never faltered, his health broke down under the trial of a prolonged anxiety, and he had to give up all active work for a time. Mother Marie Eugénie offered him a hermitage in the grounds at Auteuil, to which the community had just then moved, where he would have enjoyed complete liberty and retirement from the world. But he preferred going to Lavagnac. It was whilst he was at Lavagnac, the home of his youth, that a scheme in which Mother Marie Eugénie took a leading part, was set on foot by his friends, to set the college going once more on a sound financial basis. A company, or syndicate, was formed which took over Fr. d'Alzon's debts and assets, and assumed the management of his affairs. The public showed their confidence in the transaction by becoming subscribers, and this confidence spread before long to parents, masters and pupils. Fr. d'Alzon had committed his affairs during his illness to one of the ablest members of his Congregation, the Abbé de Cabrières. On his recovery he resumed his position as Director of what was once more a flourishing college.

These years of trial for the Founder of the Assumptionists were eventful ones for the Congregation of which Mother Marie Eugénie was Foundress. A favourable offer for the purchase of Chaillot enabled the Mother General to close with another for the acquisition of Auteuil, a fine property in the vicinity of Paris. This estate included the Château de la Tuilerie, which had been used as a shooting-box by

Francis I and Henry II in the sixteenth century. The building in existence at the time of which we are writing was erected much later; it belonged at the end of the eighteenth century to the de Brienne family. When in their possession it was frequently visited by Napoleon I when First Consul, who had a high regard for the Comtesse de Brienne. Later on it was the scene of many striking events. Rachel gave entertainments there, and Thiers presided at several public meetings under its roof in the time of King Louis-Philippe. The house was adapted without much difficulty to the requirements of a school, but it was necessary to build a convent for the nuns. The first stone of the convent was laid in April 1856, and the community entered into possession on the 10th August of the following year. Mother Marie Eugénie took a vivid interest in every detail of the new installation. She directed all the changes in the original building; and there was nothing, however insignificant, in the construction of the convent or the laying out of the grounds that escaped her notice, or to which she did not give her careful attention. In short, as the author of the *Fondatrice* remarks, it might be said of Auteuil that everything spoke of her there: it was her creation. The spirit of poverty to which the Foundress clung so closely followed the community to their new abode. We read that for some time after they had taken possession the nuns had to climb up a ladder to reach their cells, the staircase only going as far as the second floor; a palliasse, water-jug, and basin were the only furniture of their cells; the corridors were lighted by one candle only, and not even by a candle when moonlight nights made it unnecessary.

Not long after the removal from Chaillot Mother Thérèse Emmanuel put the following proposition before her novices: It was that, having come to a new house the occasion should be made use of for a renewal of fervour. Accordingly she invited them to ask

themselves what virtue they should aim at acquiring, in order to increase the fervour of the novitiate. "Think this over," she said, "before our Lord, and to-morrow I will question you on the result." The next day each of the novices produced the result of their reflections, and all had a different virtue to suggest. One of the sisters made the following remark: "It appears to me that now we have a fine monastery surrounded by a great park, we should watch specially over ourselves so as not to lose the primitive spirit of the Assumption—that spirit which up to now has made us love what is poor and inconvenient; and that we should not give ourselves up to the pleasure of our greater comfort and spaciousness, but we should only see in it a means of serving our Lord with greater facility and of having a more monastic form given to our lives." This suggestion was so entirely in accordance with Mother Marie Eugénie's feelings, that we are told she, as well as the mistress of novices, gave it her cordial approval.

The spring of 1857 brought a distinguished visitor to Paris, Cardinal Wiseman; and during his stay there he interviewed the head of the Congregation of the Assumption, with a view to a Foundation in London. Two prominent desires were ever before this holy prelate: one was to revive devotion in England to the Blessed Sacrament, the other to bring back our Lady to the country which once went by the name of her dowry. He hoped to further both ends by means of a community of nuns who would devote themselves to Perpetual Adoration, and at the same time (as their very name implied) promote, by their influence and example, devotion to the Mother of God.

Business relating to the convent at Richmond took Mother Marie Eugénie to England in March 1857. She spent some days in London, where she became acquainted with Fr. Faber and several members of the London Oratory. In a letter to Auteuil she describes them as being priests "wholly given to our

Lord and to the Roman Church, and to the sanctification and salvation of souls. This desire, that all the servants of our Lord should serve Him a little better every day (one which is so rare) is very noticeable in their sermons ; and I cannot help thinking that their influence over the spiritual lives of the members of our Congregation here will be excellent. They talk of giving us Fr. Dalgairns for our confessor."

Mother Marie Eugénie during her stay in London settled on a house in Earl's Court for the new Foundation. A recently-received convert, Mrs Montgomery devoted herself to the work of preparing the house for the community ; and on their arrival in the following September they found statues everywhere, rooms carpeted, and other comforts for which they were quite unprepared. The Superior, Mother Marie Emmanuel, relieved her feelings on the subject to the Mother General in the following letter : " We have been so well trained to do without everything that is not strictly necessary that this way of proceeding appears very strange to us. Whether Mrs Montgomery noticed our surprise or not I do not know, but she has just come to tell me that she thinks we had better make our own arrangements in accordance with the orders we have received." There had been some idea of Mrs Montgomery taking up her abode in the convent as benefactress, and joining, to the extent that her health allowed, in the community exercises ; but she soon discovered that the life was too hard for her. Though she left the convent, she remained ever a kind friend to the new Foundation.

Cardinal Wiseman was bent on making the ceremony of opening the new convent and chapel as notable an event as possible. With this view he invoked the service of the Oratorians. Mother Marie Emmanuel in describing the great day says : " Two of the Fathers of the Oratory arrived at eight o'clock to receive his Eminence, and to conclude the arrangements. His reception was most solemn. He said his Mass at a

Chapel from the Garden, Kensington Square.

School from the Garden, Kensington Square.

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quarter to nine. The Fathers, eight or nine in number, arrived later. Fr. Bowden did the honours, and was also master of ceremonies. We had deacon, sub-deacon and acolytes for the High Mass; and Fr. Dalgairns carried the Cross. The Cardinal took for the text of his sermon: 'I have found Him whom my soul loveth; I hold Him and will not let Him go' (C. of C. iii, 4).

"The Gospel history opens at the moment when the purest of virgins possessed the Lord of life and of grace as her Son, and could in truth say 'I have found Him whom my soul loveth.' The Church succeeds to Mary's charge, and she also has a right, in view of the possession of the Holy Eucharist, to exclaim, '*inveni quem diligit anima mea.*' The preacher then recalled various scenes in our Saviour's life, His visits to Zaccheus, to Bethany, and so forth, and described the joyous welcome that was given to Him. 'But why,' he then asked, 'should we envy the happiness of those who then received Him, for we have Him here in the Tabernacle and He will shortly be exposed for our veneration. In this privileged sanctuary our Lord will renew, so to speak, every mystery in His sacred life; Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Mount Calvary will be here. . . . The Precious Blood will never cease flowing from the open side of our Saviour; and in this chapel you will have a perpetual memorial of the Last Supper—an Easter which will never pass away.' He then described the effect on souls of the ceremony of that day: 'This little obscure dwelling house will become as a fortress situated at the confines of the greatest of cities, but alas! one separated from truth and from the Church. Truth, however, will flow from this sanctuary; rays of light and grace will spread over this great metropolis, a hidden might will make itself felt, similar to the mystical waters which the prophet Ezechiel saw flowing through the Temple, invisible to some, but which yet went on growing and swelling till they became a great river. In the same way

grace will descend from this sanctuary to rejoice souls, to convert many, and to sustain the labours of the ministers of Christ in their works of zeal and mercy. . . . When this lively desire to see our Lord publicly adored amongst us took possession of my soul, I could not see how I, in my feebleness, could bring it about; but by the mercy of God it has been accomplished; and to-day, in this privileged spot I see all my longings realised, and this new favour conferred on our country, plunged as it is in the darkness of error. I have now nothing more todesire, except that this community should flourish in its blessed work, and that, like the mustard-seed, it should become a fruitful and majestic tree."[1]

Cardinal Wiseman ended by thanking the nuns for the sacrifice they had made in leaving their country to establish Perpetual Adoration in a foreign land, and, with a voice broken by emotion, he told them that this day was the happiest of his life.

When at the conclusion of Mass the *O salutaris Hostia* was sung, and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed for adoration, a great wave of love and homage spread through the little congregation, and thoughts which were too deep for words, and could only be expressed by tears, were in many hearts.

Fr. Faber preached at the afternoon service. This also was attended by a number of Oratorians, who assisted at Benediction. In his sermon he alluded to the good works which had lately sprung up in England, and said that many owed their origin to the French people. "It is France who has sent us our fervent nuns; to her we owe our houses of charity and prayer. And how can we explain this except by recalling the fact that England offered a refuge to those who sought shelter from the Revolution? and now we

[1] This blessing followed the new foundation from the first house and Chapel in Earl's Court to Kensington Square, where the beautiful Chapel built by Mother Marie Marguerite, with the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and the traditional Passion Week Retreat, has been —and is—a source of grace to so many.

are amply recompensed. What do I say, recompensed? How is it possible to establish a comparison between the two orders of benefits? when we consider that, in return for a purely temporal benefit given to the French refugees, Heaven has poured forth such an abundant spiritual blessing on our country. Every Foundation is a miracle of grace, and none more so than this one." [1]

It was not long before postulants presented themselves: one of the earliest who asked for admission, Rosa Jerningham, belonged to an ancient family which had been settled in Norfolk since the time of the Danes, and more than one of whose members had shed their blood for the Faith. Her grandfather Lord Stafford (whose title had been restored in 1824) had been prominent among those who had befriended French families during the Reign of Terror; and her grandmother, by her thoughtful kindness and generosity, had earned for herself the title of the "Mother of the *Emigrés*."

The influence of these two communities of Nîmes and London, whose paramount work and attraction was Perpetual Adoration, could not—and did not—fail to make itself felt on the Congregation. To Mother Thérèse Emmanuel it came as a fresh inspiration, and as the very voice of God. For, in her work of training the novices, any one of whom might be chosen for this great work, she felt an impulse which could only come from Him to enkindle in their hearts and in her own a fresh ardour of devotion to the sacramental Presence. Some notes found amongst her papers show what was going on in her soul at this time. She begins by saying that, as she was recommending to God the fruits of the retreat which she was making, "Jesus said to me: 'I will draw you to the Blessed

[1] In 1867 Mother Marie Marguerite was sent to Kensington to open the School. She also added an Elementary School, a Training School for Domestic Service, and organised the Association of the Children of Mary, Mothers' Meetings, a Girls' Club, etc., making the London house a centre of Apostleship inspired by prayer

Sacrament'; and instantly He impressed a knowledge upon me of all His perfections hidden there. His power, wisdom and love. God is there, not to beatify, for all is not finished in the soul: He is there to carry out His work in her; to communicate Himself in His might by operating in her; in His wisdom by enlightening her; in His love by uniting Himself to her. . . . He showed me how the Lamb standing before the Throne, before whom all the Saints cry, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive honour and glory and benediction' is here also in the Blessed Sacrament, immolated on the altar in such a manner that Heaven and the altar put before us the same God as the object of our love and adoration. This thought filled me with joy. I was like some one who had never understood it before: I praised, and blessed and adored. Now that I have seen all this, I shall regret going to heaven without having paid sufficient homage to God in the Blessed Sacrament; without having sufficiently profited by the treasure concealed there." The following day she writes: "I communicated in the character of adorer of the Blessed Sacrament, 'my Beloved to me.' I felt that this mystery was for me what Bethlehem and Nazareth were for Mary, and that she was my model for love and adoration. It was all just as it was at Nazareth: Jesus, God, there, listening to us—living in the midst of us, and now, as He was then, forgotten, ignored, abandoned by men. It is Christ's last mystery on earth." The same day she heard when at prayer: "Jesus said, 'I am there. I have ministers to offer up the Sacrifice, to consecrate, but I wish to have adorers to surround me, to be my confidants, to show their love for me as the holy women who attached themselves to my person and who followed my footsteps. I call you and I call your Sisters to this work, and I shall reveal myself to them in the plenitude of my love. I will communicate myself to each one in

The Chapel, Kensington Square.

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the measure of detachment which I find in her and by which she makes room for me. Ah, what do I ask except to communicate myself to men! I am only there with this object—to love, and I ask for love.' In the evening of the same day she heard these words: 'Steep yourself in my Eucharistic life. I will that you should partake of it. I exist there in order to give, and to give myself. My habitual state is that of sacrifice. You will find in the Eucharist God the Saviour, God the Redeemer, saving men and devising new things every day for them. I desire that you should enter into a state like to mine: a transcendent state in which love enjoys full liberty. You must be converted into love and thanksgiving. That shall be your world, your true world: this will not take you away from the other; the Eucharist touches it, observe, at every moment. It is in the midst of mankind, but It mingles not with it. It dominates it. Do you the same.' 'O love, O God of love! Thou wilt then share Thy Eucharistic life with me?' 'Yes: as I shall share with you my eternal life.'"

If, at first, the holy superior and her counsellors hesitated at adding this fresh duty to those already imposed on the Congregation, it was only for fear of overtaxing their powers. By degrees, however, at the earnest entreaty of the community at the Mother house, facilities for the exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament were extended. Permission for daily Benediction was granted to them, as also for exposition on Sundays, for the special benefit of the lay Sisters, whose time is more free on those days. Finally, when the Rule was drawn up in its revised form for the approbation of the Holy See, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was specified as one of the ends of the Congregation.

CHAPTER XXII

"The day is short and the work great. It is not incumbent upon thee to complete the work, but thou must not on that account cease from it." THE TALMUD.

THE first General Chapter of the Congregation of the Assumption took place on the 2nd of September 1858. Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus, the Mother General; Mother Thérèse Emmanuel, Assistant General; Sister Marie Augustine; Sister Marie Thérèse, and Sister Marie Gonzague, counsellors, were present; also the Superiors of the four Foundations: Mother Marie Ignace of Richmond, Mother Marie Bernard of Sedan, Mother Françoise Eugénie of Nîmes, and Mother Marie Emmanuel of London, each accompanied by a delegate from their respective houses. The Chapter was presided over by the Abbé Darboy, Vicar-General of the diocese, and superior of the Monastery of Auteuil. The formality having been observed of accepting the above as authorised representatives of the Congregation, Mother Marie Eugénie proceeded to lay down her charge as Superior General and her seal of office as head of the Congregation. The election of a Superior General followed, with the result that the Foundress was unanimously re-elected. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel then spoke, and proposed in the name of several members of the Chapter who had asked her to do so, that the re-election of Mother Marie Eugénie should be definitely declared to be for her life. This would not create a precedent, her case being exceptional as Foundress of the Congregation. The president, who had received full powers from the Archbishop to confirm the elections, gave his approval of this proposition. Mother Marie Eugénie then

Mère Marie Celestine
(Frances MacDonell of Keppoch)
Superioress, Madrid, 1877-1894
Vicaress General, 1894-1898
Second Mother General, 1898-1921.

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asked for a ballot, a request which was at once granted, and again her re-election for life was carried without a dissentient voice.

The Chapter concluded, the community went in procession to the chapel, and each nun in turn came to do homage to the Superior, and kiss her hand as she sat in her stall, the Te Deum being sung the while. Joy filled all hearts at the happy termination of the first General Chapter. The re-election of their beloved Superior for life was a pledge of God's blessing on the work, and of the stability of the Congregation of the Assumption.

A second General Chapter was held in 1864; a third in 1870, and in 1876 another was held under the presidency of Fr. d'Alzon, who was delegated to the office by the Archbishop of Paris. In 1882, 1886 and 1888 three general Chapters were held, which were presided over by Mgr d'Hulst, who for sixteen years occupied the post of Superior at the Mother House. Finally the Rev. Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus convoked her last one under the presidency of the Abbé Odelin, when, surrounded by her assembled daughters, she laid down her charge in the hands of Mgr d'Hulst, and asked that Mother Marie Celestine should be given her as Vicar-General.

The following decade saw a further extension of the Congregation. Fr. d'Alzon, who, with the recovery of his health plunged once more into schemes for the extension of God's Kingdom, earnestly entreated the Mother General in 1861 to purchase the piece of land in Palestine to which tradition had assigned the name of the burying-place of the Blessed Virgin. He was at that time travelling in the East, and he was seized with a desire to rescue this hallowed spot from the schismatics who then had possession of it. After urging many reasons in favour of this proceeding he continues: "As to the Cenacle, that also should be bought. I believe it is on sale. I have thought of

the tomb of our Lady for you, and of the Cenacle for us. I would willingly put the price I should get for Vigan into it." Two years later he asks even more insistently for an answer from the Mother General as to whether she would or would not buy a piece of ground "where tradition avers that the Blessed Virgin died, and where she unquestionably lived for many years. Yes or no? If you do not answer we shall do it."

Neither she nor Fr. d'Alzon became owners of the *Dormitio B.M. Virginis* as it was called. Many years later it was bought by the Kaiser Wilhelm II, and is now occupied by a community of Benedictine monks.

In May, 1860, Mother Marie Eugénie was asked by the Archbishop of Bordeaux to found a convent in his diocese. It was a question of taking over a school and convent which belonged to a community of Dominicans of the Third Order. The Mother General gave her consent, and the first Mass was said on the feast of St Augustine, in September of that year. Unforeseen difficulties intervened later, which were of such a trying character as to cause the superior to write to Mother Marie Eugénie to ask whether it would not be better to give up the Foundation. The Mother General's answer was very characteristic. She wrote: "To leave Bordeaux on account of these obstacles would, it appears to me, be a great mistake. If we gave up good works on account of the crosses attached to them, we should have indeed to renounce all possible Foundations. We have not made one yet which has not been accompanied with great trials."

The special trials attached to this Foundation were a large crop of debts which the late owners of the convent had contracted in the town of Bordeaux, and which their successors had great difficulty in disclaiming. Matters were at last arranged through the intervention of the Archbishop; and the little community, consisting of six choir nuns and two lay-

sisters were left in peace. The school, begun on a very small scale, rapidly increased in numbers. The community owed much to the support and encouragement of the Jesuit Fathers, who had a college in their neighbourhood, and who, besides providing them with a confessor, gave catechism-lessons to the children. Their services as preachers were also invaluable to them on feasts and great occasions, and for the nuns' retreats.

Two years later the Mother General was invited by a priest at Lyons to negotiate for the ownership of a school which had been run by seculars who were desirous of handing it over to a religious community. Fr. d'Alzon used all his influence to push this scheme, and it was encouraged by Mgr de Bonald, the Archbishop of the diocese. Accordingly Mother Marie Eugénie, having agreed to the proposal, despatched four choir nuns on the 15th of May 1862 to Lyons, having given them as Superior Sister Marie du Saint Sacrament—in the world Cécile de Gouy—who was a personal friend of the Archbishop. The spot chosen for the convent was on the heights of Sainte-Foy, a hill dominating Lyons. It was thus described by one of the sisters: "All that we were told about Sainte-Foy was less than the truth. I cannot describe its beauty. The part of the house which we inhabit looks upon a garden which is situated on the slope of the mountain, and which consequently commands a view of the whole city of Lyons. From the garden we see Notre-Dame de Fourvière, perched upon a hill to our left. At our feet flows the Rhone, whose waters are as blue as a summer sky, and which receives just below us the Saône, the waters of which are green, and less beautiful than those of the Rhone. An immense stretch of country surrounds the city of Lyons, and one can perceive the Alps on the horizon half lost in the clouds. When the sky is very clear Mont Blanc is visible, with its crown of eternal snows."

The community at Sainte-Foy found kind friends

in the Marist Fathers, whose convent was close to their door. Their superior, Fr. Vitte, afterwards became Bishop of Noumea, where the fortunes of the Congregation again became mingled with his.

The Foundation of Malaga took place in 1865. We learn from the letter to the Mother General of a priest who had had previous relations with the community at Auteuil, that the south of Spain was but poorly provided with places of education. Cadiz, Xeres, Cordova and Granada, as well as Malaga, were calling out for teaching Orders. The Sacred Heart nuns had established themselves in Madrid and Barcelona, but their schools were so crowded that they had frequently to refuse pupils. In a second letter he mentions two leading families of Malaga—those of Heredia and Loring—who were prepared to send their daughters to the Assumption to be educated, and who moreover offered to defray the first expenses of the Foundation.

The journey from Paris to the south of Spain was no slight affair in the early 'sixties; the latter part of it, from Alicante to Malaga, was accomplished in a sailing-vessel. The nuns were received on their arrival by the Sisters of Charity, who, we are told, gave them a warm welcome, and with whom they lodged till the house which they hired temporarily was ready for occupation. A room was prepared for a chapel, but the community had to wait three months for permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament: the Bishop insisting on the necessity of applying for it to Rome.

"It requires to have been orphaned for three months," one of the Sisters wrote, "to realise the joy, peace and tranquillity which the presence of our Lord in the house brings to it. Yesterday we had Benediction, which was a triumph, as here it is not by any means customary. Mgr Bryan asked leave of the Bishop for the Little Sisters of the Poor, and for us to have it. The Bishop answered: 'What is the mean-

The Chapel, Assumption Convent, Málaga.

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ing of these Benedictions ?' 'Oh nothing much, my Lord,' he answered, 'It is just to ask a blessing.' 'Well I agree,' was his answer, 'because these poor nuns have only little chapels into which no one enters. I should not allow Benedictions in Churches because then every one would want to have them.' We had then to explain to the chaplain how it should be given. He asked, 'When you sing the *O Salutaris* and the litanies, have I to sing ?' 'No, Father.' 'Then shall I smoke ?' This proposal caused some astonishment till it was explained that in Spanish that word is commonly used for incensing."

The school and community soon outgrew the narrow limits of the house in Malaga : a large piece of ground was then purchased in the vicinity of the town, on which suitable buildings were erected. This Foundation met from the first start with much encouragement and sympathy from the Spanish people, and was followed later on by several others ; it may therefore be looked upon as an important one in the history of the development of the Congregation.

There were other interests growing up nearer home, which appealed to Mother Marie Eugénie's sympathies almost as much as those further afield ; for they also made for the growth of God's Kingdom on earth. One of these was connected with an institute which took its rise from Fr. d'Alzon's ever fertile brain. This institute was a Third Order of the Congregation of the Assumptionists, which worked under the direction of the Assumptionist Fathers and was linked with theirs.

In the years 1863–6, during which the Congregation of which Mother Marie Eugénie was Foundress was throwing out fresh off-shoots in France and Spain, Fr. d'Alzon was similarly occupied in the near East. He saw in the decadent state of the Greek Church a great opening for missionary work, especially in the direction of establishing schools for the youth of

both sexes. He had made strong appeals to the Mother General to make Foundations first at Philippopolis, and later on in Bulgaria, with this object. But, much as she must have felt the pain she was giving by a refusal, she made up her mind that it was not for the interests of her Congregation to do so. We learn from the *Origines* that the result was a slight suspension of the cordial relations between her and Fr. d'Alzon. Such a cloud, however, could not be, and was not, of long duration; and when he brought before Mother Marie Eugénie the wants of another institute which he was in course of founding, to which he gave the name of Oblate Sisters, she threw herself heart and soul into the new undertaking. Fr. d'Alzon had made over the house of Vigan to the Oblates for their training-ground, and had given them Fr. Hippolyte, a member of his Congregation, as confessor and spiritual Father; but it was necessary also to provide them with a superior who would train them in religious virtues and habits. To supply this want he had recourse to Mother Marie Eugénie. She offered him the services of Mother Marie Madeleine, who was at that time superior at Sedan: a religious of great virtue and prudence, who was always prepared to undertake any duties assigned to her.

A letter dated 8th August 1865 shows Fr. d'Alzon's gratitude: "Mother Marie Madeleine is doing splendidly, and we greatly appreciate this gift, or loan, of her which we have received. She has put order and the Rule into our girls, and has given a direction to their spirit. She leads them with gentleness and firmness, which I admire all the more because it is clear she was under no delusion about the rawness of the material upon which she has to work. She strengthens her position as superior daily, and I think she perceives that I am doing all I can to help her. When she becomes better acquainted with their natures, in which at first sight there appears to be an

extraordinary mixture of right-mindedness, ignorance, intelligence and faith, she will discover that she can take her own time with them in leading them in the paths of virtue. That at least is my impression. . . . There are ten here at present, and we are expecting seven or eight more between this and November. I expect that there will be twenty before the first of January."

The letters of the Mother General to the superior at Vigan shows that delicate perception of Mother Marie Madeleine's character, and also of all the difficulties which surrounded the position in which she was placed, which were so characteristic of the holy Foundress.

"How deeply I take part," she writes, "in all that you have to try you at this moment. How grateful I am for your generosity, as I see every day more all that is embarrassing and all that asks for sacrifice on your part in your position. Still you must not let your large-heartedness lead you to give in on all points. It is necessary that you should be *superior* from every point of view. and that you should only give the habit to those whose character and submission towards you afford the necessary guarantees. The others can wait; and when they have all been given the habit you should only keep those of whom you can be quite sure—the novices of a dependable character who would be safe in situations which might be dangerous; who are frank, devoted, obedient, and have a good and sound judgment. It would be better to have few, and only such characters." In a letter dated the 4th of August the Mother General deals with the subject from another very practical point of view:

"The girls whom you have charge of, being destined for missionary work, should be thoroughly tried. Do this with regard to their work, making them undo, sometimes, what they have done badly. I think that all should learn in turn how to cook, and to do it as

little badly as possible, as it is a pity for food to be spoilt. Do not do too much sewing: in fact I must insist on your taking care of your sight. You are there to explain to the Sisters their duties with the help of Rodriguez and passages from St Francis de Sales, St Vincent de Paul, and St Jane Chantal; to show them how to do all with care, order and cleanliness, and to train them to a life in common like that of nuns. Take care that they learn how to make the *pot-au feu*, to roast, prepare eggs, vegetable soup and vegetables. Wherever they may be they will require such knowledge. I do not wish you to rise at night for adoration; it is not part of your Rule. . . . Do not hesitate to give yourself the dispensations which you judge necessary. I grant them beforehand." "Mother Marie Madeleine," we read in the *Origines*, "fulfilled the duties assigned to her admirably. Backed up by Fr. Hippolyte, guided by Fr. d'Alzon and Mother Marie Eugénie, she grasped the special formation of character required for Sisters destined exclusively for foreign missions. Rising at four in the morning like her daughters, living their life, sharing their rural occupations, she formed them to a hard life, one of sacrifice, and prepared them for the privations and sufferings which were in store for them. Her influence, as Fr. d'Alzon repeated incessantly, was excellent; and the first members of the company of Oblates formed by Sister Marie Madeleine, who were sent later to Bulgaria to found schools and hospitals, have preserved a life-long recollection of her." She remained two years at Vigan, and then was recalled to Sedan. After Fr. d'Alzon's death the Oblates split up into two parties, one of whom became known as the Oblates of Nîmes, and the other worked under the guidance of the Assumptionist Fathers in Paris.

At the same time that Mother Marie Madeleine was occupied in training the Oblates at Vigan, a work sprang up in Paris which owed its existence to Fr.

Pernet, a son of Fr. d'Alzon. He gave it the name of the " Little Sisters of the Assumption," and its object was to provide nurses for the poor exclusively. A woman of great virtue and rare courage, Mlle Fage, was destined by Fr. Pernet as Superior ; but before she took the direction of the work he obtained permission from the Mother General for her to spend some time with the nuns at Auteuil. She had frequent intercourse while she was there with Mother Marie Eugénie, and, as she relates later, received many useful counsels and great assistance from her. The latter also brought the new Congregation under the notice of the Children of Mary, many of whom, past as well as present, took up the work warmly, and did what they could to spread the knowledge of it in their homes. A great blessing seemed to attend the Little Sisters of the Assumption. They were welcomed in many parts of France and, later on, in England and America, where they still carry on their work of mercy.

If we turn to the correspondence between Fr. d'Alzon and his holy penitent, we shall find special interest in a letter dated 12th of March 1865. He says, " I will say Mass for you on Friday, feast of the Holy Winding-Sheet. It seems to me I should do well to ask our Lord to wrap you up in this sacred winding-sheet as in a death-shroud, that, dead to all earthly things, you may rise again to the eternal, and to all that is holy and perfect." This prayer was destined to be heard. For it was on the eve of the feast of the holy Winding-Sheet in 1898, that after three years of suffering and death to the world—a true shroud that separated her from earthly things—Mother Marie Eugénie gave up her soul to God.

A little later he writes again : " Every time for three weeks whenever I have prayed for you, one thought only presents itself to my mind : those words of God to Abraham, ' Walk before Me and be perfect ' ; with a simple, humble, calm, patient, sweet, loving

perfection, keeping yourself under the eye of our Lord. That possession of oneself in peace, that sacrifice of self without any resumption of what one offers, because one only thinks of Him to whom it is offered—that is what I ask continually for you. Is it because I ask it also for myself that I do so? For indeed I am far from possessing it." On the eve of New Year's day, 1866, we find the following: "Though dragged in all directions, I must write, my dear daughter, to wish you a happy New Year. The admirable letter which you have written to me went to my heart. Ask these feelings from our Lord for me. May this good Master give me the grace to serve Him, and to serve Him with you in a union which, in spite of some suffering, has been to me, and I love to think to you also, a great power in our lives. I understand from the manner in which I have made my sons suffer without intending it, and even when I thought I was giving them a mark of my confidence, how I have made you suffer. I cannot tell you how much I regret it, and it seems to me that we should employ the little time that remains to us differently. The longer I live the greater is my wish to extend the work of the Assumption, and I beg that you will prepare a number of questions about yourselves and us for the month of February. Adieu, my daughter; I can assure you that nothing but a pleasing impression remains with me of my last journey; not a shadow of soreness, only a great desire that we should continue to work for our common ends, putting into them all the heart and intelligence that each of us possesses."

The Foundation at Poitiers followed closely on that of Malaga. It was made at the pressing invitation of the Abbé Gay, who for many years had been connected with the Congregation as spiritual adviser to many members of the community, and as Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's director. He was at the time of which we speak Vicar-General to Mgr Pie, Bishop

of the diocese, who was also desirous of seeing a community of nuns, one of whose objects was that of Perpetual Adoration, settled at Poitiers. The office of finding a house for them was entrusted to Mme de Pascal, a devout woman, and a great supporter of Mgr Gay in his good works. After some cogitation she settled on a small house in the immediate neighbourhood of the Church of Ste Radegonde. That, and its low price, seem to have been its recommendations. Mgr Gay, in writing to the Mother General on the subject, remarks: "There will be a good deal to do to it, and a certain amount of money to be spent upon it; but I shall be mistaken if you do not consider that it will suffice provisionally, and even for a certain length of time. It will always be a humble and poor abode; but that will only be another claim to God's blessing and to its attraction for pious souls, and an additional attraction to you. The neighbourhood of this shrine, from which so many blessings continue to flow, is an inexpressible blessing. Though its position is at the end of the town, the concourse of pilgrims renders it, practically, very central; and how many, finding that our Lord is exposed within a few steps of the tomb of the dear saint, will combine the two devotions. Every development which has taken place at Poitiers seems by a special Providence to have issued from under the shadow of this sanctuary. This applies especially in our times to the Jesuits and the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame. To sum up, it is a hallowed spot, and the tranquillity which one may there enjoy suffices to make it precious as a house of prayer."

Mother Françoise Eugénie was sent as Superior to the new foundation, and never was a choice more felicitous, as, to a contemplative soul such as hers, the solitude and remoteness of the spot made it appear to her almost as an ante-room of Paradise. Her first letter from Poitiers is dated April 27th, 1866. In it

she describes her arrival, and her consternation at finding that it would be a long time before the house could be rendered habitable. The chapel was wanting in everything, all its furnishings consisting of six candlesticks. There were no beds or bedding, and the first thing to be done was to send Sister Marie Baptiste, the lay Sister who accompanied her, to buy stuff for palliasses. In a second letter she writes to the Superior at Nîmes: "Here we are at Poitiers. Everything is as it should be in the priory: on one side we have the church, on the other a hill, and solitude and silence all around us. My first thought on entering our little convent was to gather some flowers which I send to you. They grew on the church walls. One could not build one's nest better than near this tomb. I am still homeless with Sister Marie Baptiste. We are making palliasses, buying pots and pans and a hundred things—soon I shall have no money; and then, covered with dust and straw I receive visits and pay them. I am lodging with a lady who is a friend of M. Gay, she is kindness itself, but she fusses too much about our affairs. I can assure you that it is not only at Nîmes that people get excited. This good lady said to me yesterday: 'My dear little mother, I do wish I could see you a little roused.' That brought me bad luck. Would you believe it I woke up last night in a state of anguish. 'Here are the Sisters arriving on Monday,' I said to myself, 'and nothing is ready. What shall I give them to eat? And the cleaning up, and provisions I ought to lay in! And I have no money.' The agony rose higher and higher, and still daylight did not appear. Finally, as soon as I was able, I went to the house, took a kitchen apron, and washed the window panes. That calmed me a little."

Perpetual Adoration was the principal work of the Poitiers Foundation; to this was added retreats for women of the world, and courses of instruction, and

catechism-lessons for young girls. A school was not started till many years later.

The letters between Mother Françoise Eugénie and her former Superior, from which we have already quoted, besides breathing a deep piety, are relieved by touches of personal experiences in a lighter vein, which show that it is not necessary to lose a sense of the ridiculous in becoming a nun.

"I have not said anything about our life," she writes, "it is all concentrated in adoration and work, and conducted in the strictest poverty. I feel this should be a house of recollection, and our life, like the one spoken of by our Lord when He said to His disciples: 'Come apart into a desert place and rest a little.' What I wish for it, therefore, is that it should be a house of silence and prayer, where the impression of our Saviour's life shall alone make itself felt, and where every heart may become so enamoured of Him that He may derive perfect consolation from it." In another letter, conveying her good wishes to the community of Nîmes for the New Year, she writes: "I use you as an example when the Sisters complain a little of the hard work. For instance, on Christmas Eve I said to them: 'Well! supposing you had to worry about examinations, to prepare for the children's departure, to make up their school reports, to pack their trunks and so forth?' I don't allow any one to complain, so that I run the risk one fine day of finding one of them dead on the road, because she has not dared to ask leave to go to bed."

We should be quite mistaken, however, we are told, if we took these words literally. Mother Françoise Eugénie, on the contrary, had the heart of a mother for every member of her community, and she was known to get up, frequently, long before the rest to do the work of a lay-sister who she thought required a longer sleep.

The care of those who came to make retreats was

one of Mother Françoise Eugénie's duties. There is a spice of malice in the allusions which she makes to some of them in her letters to Nîmes, such as the following: "We have got a lady in retreat here at present who keeps me busy. She will not be left alone for one moment, and wishes to decide her vocation in three days. She is a widow, and they want her to marry her brother-in-law of whom she is very fond. Notwithstanding this she is tormented by the grief of a widowhood to which she thought herself bound, by the wish to be a nun, by the desire to marry. *Tout cela fait grande bataille, et j'en ai aujourd-hui la migraine.*"

A story about that man of mystery, Napoleon III, may amuse the reader: "The great news of Poitiers which I give you, in case it might interest Fr. d'Alzon or M. de Cabrières, is that our Bishop went to call on the Emperor on Ash Wednesday at His Holiness's request. All his friends have been pumping him to find out what was said at the interview, and no one can get a word out of him. The Bishop's secretary then became the resource of the curious; but he, notwithstanding his wish to satisfy them, could only get hold of these words: 'At the moment when his Lordship entered the Emperor said to him, "Ah, Monsieur l'Evêque—it is indeed some time since you have been seen," (*qu'on vous a vu*). And the Bishop answered, "*Ah Sire, vous me comblez*," and the door then being shut, "*il faut se mortifier sur le reste.*"' But since that moment government has given money for the repair of the Archbishop's house and the churches, and all persecution seems over."

[1] "But if Mother Françoise Eugénie had the gift of lending charms to the details of every day, her real life was not entangled with them. The serious part of her correspondence, especially her letters to Mother

[1] The following appreciation of this holy nun is from the pen of a member of the community of the Assumption, Kensington Square.

Marie Gabrielle, reveal that spontaneous supernaturalness which was so characteristic of her.

She writes thus :—

"Have confidence; our Lord will teach you how to pray. When anyone is burdened and overwhelmed, as a Superior nearly always is, I think prayer ought to be the hushing of the soul into silence, where the whole-hearted acceptance of all that crushes us rises to God in increase of trust, submission and utter self-surrender. It ought to be our time of refreshing homeliness."

"I am afraid I must get lost in poetry when I write to you, as I give you the impression of being in the clouds, but all the same I am Simple Simon as much as ever, only all my journeys have fledged me little inward wings which sometimes carry me right up to our Lord."

"God lets trouble come upon us so that we may understand the beatitudes here below: blessed are they that mourn, they that suffer persecution, they that hunger and thirst. I think, mind you, that it is hardly possible to find joy in these things, but one finds our Lord who is beatitude itself. I am going to let you into a little secret of mine for when I am in great trouble, so that you may try it in time of stress. I fix the eyes of my soul on our Lord crucified, I do not let Him out of my sight, I only look at Him and let go all thought of anything else—I mean all joy, all rest. That gives me great courage and really brings joy out of sorrow, for then one can tell our Lord that one clings to nothing else, and that one loves Him with one's whole soul."

"The world is a tiring place—harmony in the heart and discords all around, misunderstandings, jars, clashes. Well, it is a factory for heaven, only there above will there be harmony without noise, without grating, in eternal unison and peace.

"Yes, I love suffering, I think life without it would be unbearable; it is only suffering which gives it

weight and meaning. After all, we are religious so as to suffer and let ourselves be fastened to the cross as God pleases. Once one realises that one stretches out one's arms to suffering and one ends by finding the beauty there is in being crushed utterly, because thus is shed abroad the sweet fragrance of Jesus Christ, and thus is the soul really lost in Him and separated from all else."

Just before leaving Poitiers she writes : " I am used to taking the pilgrim's staff and I sing as I go. A journey more than anything else shows one the reality of life ; we are wayfarers on earth ; I feel myself untrammelled and I set off with a light heart."

Mère Marie Catherine
Superioress, Paris, 1886-1899
Assistant General, 1898-1921
Third Mother General, September-December 1921.

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CHAPTER XXIII

Ave Roma Immortalis!

A visit to Rome leaves an indelible impression even on the hardened sightseer, such as no other city produces. First there is the view of the dome of St Peter dominating the lesser buildings, and reducing even the seven hills to insignificance. Then he will recall the next scene—second only in interest to the first—when, emerging from crowded streets, he finds himself on the great Piazza with its glorious colonnade, its flashing fountains leading the eye up to Michæl Angelo's master-piece, the façade of St Peter's. But all these architectural glories will fade before the effect produced on a believer in the Divinity of Christ when he stands under the dome, and over the Confession of St Peter and reads the words inscribed there : " *Tu es Petrus* " : " Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church " ; and when his memory recalls those other words of Him whom holy writ calls the Word of the Father—the Word made Flesh : " Heaven and earth shall pass away but My words shall not pass away."

To one like Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus, whose devotion to Holy Church was only second to that to its divine Head, the first visit to Rome must have been an ever-memorable one. Her object is undertaking the journey was to further the interests of her Congregation by getting a more explicit approbation for it. Accordingly, having provided herself with numerous letters of commendation from her many powerful friends in high ecclesiastical circles, she started from Marseilles on May 16th 1866, accompanied by one of her daughters, whom she had singled out on account of

her knowledge of the Italian language. The voyage from Marseilles to Civita Vecchia took three days. Mgr Pie, Bishop of Poitiers, was one of her fellow-passengers: a fortunate circumstance, as she found him of great use to her during her stay in the holy city.

Directly on arriving the Mother General and her companion started off to visit the Tomb of the Apostles, and there, kneeling on that hallowed spot she poured forth her soul in prayer. The Sister, describing for the benefit of the community at Auteuil all the happenings of the journey, says: "Our Mother was deeply moved; she prayed there a long time and she seemed as if she could hardly tear herself away from that holy place. On leaving the building she said: 'What a supernatural atmosphere one breathes here. I prayed a great deal for the Congregation, and I asked of St Peter that love of the Church should always be its principal characteristic. May it perish if it is not ever tenderly united to the Roman See!'"

The first sight which the Mother General had of Pius IX was on the feast of Pentecost, when he assisted at Mass at the Sistine Chapel; the second at the Roman Oratory on the feast of St Philip Neri. The travellers had arrived in Rome on the eve of Whit Sunday: in consequence they found all the Papal Offices closed, as is usual in Rome during the octave of that feast. Being unable therefore to present her papers and statement of affairs to the proper quarter, Mother Marie Eugénie utilized the time by calling on the Cardinals Quaglia and Villecourt. The former was Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He received the two nuns with great kindness, and the Foundress explained that she had come to Rome to lay her Rule and Constitutions at the feet of His Holiness. "We have come," she continued, "to Rome as to the source of all light to be enlightened, to ask advice, to learn what the Church thinks of the observances and works of our Congregation, and to put

ourselves in all matters in the hands of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, for whom it is our glory to profess the most tender and filial love."

The Cardinal answered in Italian in a most cordial manner, and after glancing through the Bishop's letters which she presented to him told her that they did her and her Congregation much honour. He then asked what were their works, and when she explained that they were, "Prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the Divine Office, and the education of children," he showed a hearty approval. They visited next Cardinal Villecourt, former Bishop of La Rochelle, to whom they had brought letters of introduction from France. He specially recommended them to train their children in the practice of humility. "Remark," he said, "that this is a virtue too often ignored in these times; it is no longer inculcated in education, and yet it is the evangelical virtue by excellence, and is the foundation of the Christian life and of all sanctity."

The first audience of the Mother General and her companion with the Pope took place on the feast of Corpus Christi, the 31st of May. They assisted in the morning at a grand procession, in which Pius IX, seated in the *sedia gestatoria*, carried the Blessed Sacrament, accompanied by Cardinals, bishops, members of many religious Orders and a great crowd of the faithful. The Noble Guard was in attendance; and no doubt it rejoiced the two French nuns to see their countrymen, the soldiers of the French army of occupation with their Generals, guarding the sacred person of the Vicar of Christ.

The audience was fixed for six o'clock in the evening. On her return from St Peter's the Superior said to her companion: "I should like to pray a great deal before going to see the Pope, and to spend two or three hours before the Blessed Sacrament." Arrived at the Vatican, they were shewn into an ante-room and there

awaited their turn. At last "the nuns of the Assumption" were called, and they were ushered into the presence of the Pope. "A white vision"—thus he is described by the Mother General's companion, "was standing clothed in a white moiré soutane with a white sash, white-haired, near a writing-table ready to receive us. "Ah" he said smiling on seeing us, "here are some nuns, and nuns should be saints. You are saints, are you not, my daughters?"

We will continue to quote from the same authority, taking the liberty of slightly abbreviating her account. "The Holy Father," she writes, "received us with touching kindness; he would not have us remain on our knees, and sat down himself, saying that he was much fatigued by the morning's ceremony. He was indeed exceedingly pale; but what serenity was visible on his countenance! He knew we had come from Nîmes and spoke to us about Fr. d'Alzon and Mgr Plantier, whose health had caused him much anxiety. He then blessed the rosaries and medals which we held in our hands, and granted a plenary indulgence at the hour of death for all the nuns and children who were at that time at the Assumption. My emotion was great at finding myself face to face with Pius IX, and hearing him talk to us as a father talks to his children; but what added to it was the sight of our Mother. She could hardly speak, so deeply was she moved, but the few words she spoke were most touching. The holy Father realised the faith and love which lay below an emotion which almost choked her utterance, and showed her the greatest kindness. His countenance, usually so serene, took a shade of sadness when she spoke of the sorrow which we felt for him in his trials, and of the filial love we had for him, and how a Sister and a child offered a communion daily at Auteuil for his intentions. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'pray hard for me and for the Church.' He showed great gratitude for

the casket of gold coins, and the diamonds [1] with which we presented him, and which came from the pupils of the Assumption. Our Mother then asked him to write his name on a picture as a souvenir of our visit. 'Oh,' he said, 'that is forbidden. The Pope is an old man, he can hardly see, and must not do so much writing—but what then is this picture?' 'It is one that is very dear to us Holy Father.' At the same time she made me a sign to fold up a large portrait of him which we had brought with us. He, on the other hand, beckoned to me to come nearer, I obeyed and he put his signature to it and wrote the words: '*Dominus custodiat gressus vestros et intelligentias vestras*' below. After a little more conversation he perceived a friend of our Mother who had accompanied us to Rome, and who was kneeling at some distance not daring to advance. 'Who is this lady?' he said, and then with a smile, 'Is it a penitent? Come forward my child.' Mme L. approached, and the Holy Father said a few kindly words to her with that delightful and playful readiness in conversation which is one of his gifts; and when she asked him to be so good as to sign a paper giving an indulgence *in articulo mortis* to her relations and servants, 'Ah,' he answered, 'for the servants! that is right, quite right. *Ma questi Francesi!* The Pope is like a police officer for them He has to sign papers, passports . . . but,' he added with an upturned look 'these are passports for heaven.'

"The audience had been a long one, though to us it seemed short; and after kissing the foot, ring, and hand of the Pope we left the presence-chamber."

The time spent by the Mother General in Rome was one of deep consolation to her. With the exception of the time which had to be given to the affairs of her Order, she employed it in visiting the different churches and shrines of the saints and martyrs. She had a considerable knowledge of architecture, and her

[1] The latter were the gift of a novice.

views, like those which she entertained on all subjects, were very broad and enlightened. Speaking one day to her companion about the Roman churches, she said: "Those who experience a disenchantment here have not grasped the idea of the Italian basilicas. Our Gothic churches in France have unquestionably something more mysterious about them: they represent the Church militant, which weeps and prays, awaiting heaven; but here we have the Church triumphant with its angels and its saints. It is the heavenly Jerusalem, the spouse of the Lamb appearing to us in all its glory."

We find a description in the journal kept by Mother Marie Eugénie's companion of the life led by the two nuns in Rome. "Every morning, after our official visits, we went to visit some sanctuary, or to pray at the tomb of a martyr. In the evening we read the 'Sketch of Christian Rome,' by Mgr Gerbet. This book had been given to our Mother by its author, and was annotated in his handwriting. She used to read aloud a description of the place which we had visited that day, or which we were to go and see on the following day. . . . Our principal protector in Rome, and the one who helped us more than any other to enjoy the beauties of the Eternal City, was Mgr Pie, Bishop of Poitiers." It was owing to him that they saw the great sights of Rome under the most favourable circumstances: the catacombs, in company with a party led by the Cavaliere di Rossi, who explained all the hidden meanings of those wonderful monuments of the past; the Stanze of Raphael with Mgr Bastide, who lectured on their beauties, and pointed out the theological truths contained in them.

We read again in the journal that "Our Mother does not understand Italian, but her knowledge of Latin helped her when visiting the sights and even the streets of Rome. Her breviary was of great use to her also. She had always recited it with such

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attention that she knew it almost all by heart. Thus the legends of the saints were always coming back to her mind. She told us in which catacomb the body of such and such a martyr had been deposited, and so forth. Mgr Bastide wished to celebrate Mass for us in the room in which St Stanislas died, and invited us for 19th June, without telling us where it was. 'It must be at the Roman College,' Mme L. said, 'where the rooms of St Aloysius and Blessed J. Berchmans are.' 'Not at all' said our Mother, 'St Stanislas died at the Quirinal; we shall have to go there. Do you not remember (she said to me) in the first lesson of the legend of the saint in your breviary: *Die assumptæ in cœlum Virgini sacro ab ipsa beatarum Virginum choro stipata vocatus est ex Quirinali domo probationis, anno innocentis vitæ decimo octavo*, etc.'" She was quite right. Mgr Bastide was expecting us at the Quirinal.

Though everything promised well in the beginning for the business which brought the Mother General to Rome, this happy state of things did not last. Before long she was made aware that obstacles had been put in the way of the settlement of the question of a formal approbation, and that as long as they existed the Holy See was not likely to accede to her petition. The obstacles lay with the Archbishop of Paris and his Vicar General, M. Véron. A letter of enquiry which the secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars addressed to the former remained unanswered. Mother Marie Eugénie wrote at once to Mother Thérèse Emmanuel instructing her to call at the Archbishop's House and enquire about the cause of the delay. The answer given by M. Véron was not re-assuring. "Your Mother, he said, is in a great hurry. Rome is slow. The Foundress of the Marie-Réparatrice had to remain six months in Rome in order to obtain a simple brief of praise. They are right in taking time. In such matters I am not in favour of the '*furia Francese*,' but of Roman slowness."

There was however (as the Mother General soon discovered) more than admiration of Roman methods in this vexatious delay. Archbishop Darboy's mind had been poisoned against her by misrepresentations which had reached him from the holy city. She was accused of having complained of his administration of the diocese, and of having made changes in the Constitutions. Such being the state of affairs, there was no object to be gained by a prolongation of Mother Marie Eugénie's stay in Rome. Before leaving she had the consolation of a second audience with Pius IX, and she started on her return journey on 4th July, taking Nîmes on her way to Paris. A letter reached her there from Fr. Picard, which acquainted her with the real state of the case. He begins by preparing her for crosses, and continues, " M. Véron has undertaken to put up some for you. He wishes to make the approbation more precious by obliging you to fight for it. You will have to take time and precautions to attain your end. M. Véron asks to be acquainted with the financial state of all the houses, and constitutes himself in the last analysis judge of the Constitutions. I have advised Sister Marie Caroline (*économe*) to answer that each house is independent financially, being responsible only to the bishop of the diocese. By this answer you will gain time."

The situation was such a grave one for the future of the Congregation, that Mother Marie Eugénie offered to summon a general Chapter and give her resignation ; it being obvious that the antagonism of the Archbishop and M. Véron centred on her. Several of the bishops, however, who were concerned with the institute, persuaded her to withdraw it. Fr. d'Alzon wrote : " Above all, do not resign. It would be folly to do so. A Congregation is not a constitutional government. The Archbishop of Paris will see in the long run that this is an intolerable abuse of power of which he will have ultimately to give an account in the proper

Assumption Convent, St. Dizier.

quarter. I am praying for you, and asking of God that your health may stand the strain. This trial will in the end make the superior holier, and the Congregation more fervent."

The unaccountable behaviour of M. Véron, who, after having been for seven years a tried friend to the Congregation, became its severe critic, and even opponent, was partially explained by physical reasons. His health, which had been failing for some time, broke down directly after his appointment as rector to the parish of St Vincent de Paul; and he died of apoplexy in the month of December of the same year. It was not, however, till the following September that, on the 14th of the month, 1867, Pius IX signed the document giving a formal approbation to the Congregation. It was hailed with joy and thanksgiving by the Mother General and by her daughters. In a letter to Mgr Pie she expresses her deep gratitude to him for the share he had had in bringing about this desirable result, which was of such paramount importance to the future of the Assumption.

Three Foundations followed one another in quick succession in the year 1868: those of Rheims, Saint-Dizier, and Nice. They were established, like all those that preceded them, in poverty, self-denial and profound faith in the providence of God—a faith which has never been made void. The Congregation had to lament the death of two Sisters (one of whom, Sister Marie Caroline, had already rendered great services to it as head mistress) during the two years that followed. The other, Sister Thérèse Marie, died at the early age of twenty-four, having already attained to great perfection, and a detachment so complete that death seemed to have no terrors for her. Fr. d'Alzon, in writing to Mother Marie Eugénie to condole with her, bade her let God have His way: "These sacrifices bring a great blessing. The Assumption has its work on earth, it has also its work in Heaven. There are

laid up those treasures of grace which will be a source of strength to the toilers on earth whose harvest is not yet gathered."

The great event of the year 1870, that of the Œcumenical Council, was one of profound interest to Mother Marie Eugénie. She and all the Congregation united their prayers with the whole of Catholic Christendom in imploring the grace of the Holy Spirit to direct its members aright. The doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope was one that presented no difficulties to her; she had believed it as long as she believed anything, and she hailed its definition as an added glory to the Vicar of Christ and His Church.

CHAPTER XXIV

"I thank Thee O Lord for doing Thine own Will in Thine own way because it is Thy Will. I will whatever Thou willest. I will it in the way Thou willest. I will it as long as Thou willest it."

BLOSIUS.

THE year 1870–1 will ever be stamped in the recollection of French men and women for generations to come as the "Année terrible". A biographer of Mother Marie Eugénie need not follow all the phases of a conflict in which a gallant nation lay crushed, first under the feet of a merciless conqueror, and then under the no less merciless sway of a revolutionary party formed of the very dregs of the population of Paris. The Mother General saw none of these events. As soon as the war broke out, or rather as soon as it was obvious that the tide of victory had turned against the French armies and that Paris was menaced, she, by the advice of her counsellors, and that of the spiritual Father of the community, Fr. Picard, abandoned Auteuil to the care of Mother Marie Séraphine, a religious of great piety and strength of character, and repaired first to her convent at Poitiers, and later on to other houses beyond the war zone. That it cost her much to come to this decision is obvious from her letters and what we know of her character. But the line of duty lay so clear before her that it was impossible to hesitate. For how could she have conducted the affairs of her Congregation from Paris, the centre of the disturbance, in the event of its being invested? And this possibility was converted so rapidly into a certainty after the three defeats of Wissembourg, Fosbach, and Reischoffen, that it had to be acted upon without a moment's delay.

One of the first acts of the Mother General after war was declared was to offer the convent of St Dizier to the Emperor to be used as a hospital. He answered it as follows through his secretary: "The Emperor has received the letter you have addressed to him on the 21st of this month in which you offer the buildings of your monastery at St Dizier for the wounded of our army. His Majesty is much touched by this patriotic offer, and he has charged me to transmit the expression of his gratitude to you."

This letter is signed by Castelnau, "Aide-de-camp de l'Empereur." The writer, then a youth of twenty, lived to see the fortunes of the two great nations reversed, and the triumph of his own. His after-career as head of the G.H.Q. staff was a brilliant one, and his fidelity to his religion alone stood in the way of his attainment of the highest honours.

Mother Marie Eugénie was at Lyons when the news arrived of the investment of Sedan; she returned at once to Auteuil, where preparations had already been begun to be made for a general dispersion. As it was the time of the summer vacation, the children had already returned to their homes. On the 12th of August eight English Sisters started for London. The following day a little colony started for Touraine, where an uncle of a member of the Congregation, the Marquis d'Effiat, had offered them a refuge. It must have been hard for the Mother General to decide whom to leave at Auteuil, for all the nuns volunteered for the post of danger; the choice she made in leaving Mother Marie Séraphine as superior was fully justified by events. The day before her departure she held a Chapter, at which she told them that it was with the liveliest regret that she parted with them at a moment of impending trials which she would willingly have shared with them. "But" she added, "I must provide for the safety of the Sisters in our houses situated in the provinces, for they also are exposed to

great danger. Fear not, little flock, nothing can happen to you except by the permission of God, and what He permits will be for the best. If one of the generals in command of our army was able to say to his soldiers: 'Why should you be afraid of bullets, my men? They can only kill,' can you, my daughters, be afraid of them? I leave you sufficiently numerous to be able to recite the Divine Office in choir and to provide for the wants of the wounded. You will have them assuredly, and you should devote your time and your strength to them. The result will be many fatigues to which you are unaccustomed, but the wounded will be your protection in the sight of God as well as before men. I recommend you very specially to edify them, and to support one another by your charity, and your spirit of self-abnegation and sacrifice. I bless you, my dear daughters, from the bottom of my heart, and confide you to the Blessed Virgin, that she may watch over you and protect you."

The convents of St Dizier and Sedan were the first to suffer. The superior of the former writing to the Mother General remarks that the Prussian army, "which is said neither to rob nor pillage," had left them in a state which would have rejoiced the heart of St Francis of Assisi: that is, stripped of all their possessions: "blankets, pieces of stuff and linen, books, everything worth taking, are all on their way to Berlin." At Sedan, the convent, notwithstanding two large white flags signifying that it had been put at the service of the sick and wounded, seemed to be a target for shot and shell. Its walls sheltered the soldiers of both armies. The superior made an appeal to them first in German and then in French to keep the peace; and the response to it was hearty on the part of all the inmates. "On the battle-field we are enemies," they cried, "but here we are all comrades." The community were not satisfied with caring for the bodies of the wounded; they had the consolation of

turning their souls to God. "Almost all our soldiers have approached the Sacraments," she writes to the Mother General. "M. Nanquette devotes himself utterly to them. We have prayers, grace before meals, the Angelus, and night-prayers in every ward, and all the men answer them." Thus it was, as we have seen again in our days, that the soul of the French soldier left to his racial instinct turns to God as a plant seeks for air and sunshine.

The convent at Rheims escaped with less damage than either St Dizier or Sedan, the Sisters having taken the precaution to write *Schule* on the entrance, a device which saved it from military occupation.

The anxiety and anguish of the Mother General, when she heard of the sufferings of her daughters and the trials they were undergoing, may be easily imagined. "A proclamation affixed to the Town Hall this morning," she wrote from Poitiers in a letter dated September 6th, "and signed by Gambetta, Minister of the Interior, acquainted us with what had happened yesterday in Paris. How do people accept the situation? They say that the Empress left on Friday. Much anxiety is expressed here about the Fort of Issy which faces you. People believe that the Prussians will seize it in order to bombard Paris. . . . I still trust in God's protection of France." The next day she writes: "At last I have had news of the Sisters at Sedan. But what a cruel day for the glory of France!" A little later we find the following in her correspondence, "The critical moment has arrived. The Prussians are approaching Paris. I hear to-day from the Sisters at Auteuil that I shall soon get no letters from them. Then there are the Revolutionaries who are beginning to agitate; people are dreading what they may do in Paris, and people are suffering from them at Lyons. I forsee a bad time for the great towns. Ah! let us pray—let us pray hard."

Troubles were in truth brewing at Lyons, and

Mother Thérèse Emmanuel who with the noviceship was settled at Sainte-Foy, was receiving constant letters from anxious parents begging her to let them take their daughters home. On the strength of these representations she wrote to the Mother General asking her if the moment had not come to seek refuge in Switzerland. The answer runs as follows: "After carefully reading the accounts you give me, my dear daughter, I cannot divest myself of the idea that you have been unnecessarily alarmed, and that such strong measures are not as yet required. The notion that the Prussians are advancing on Lyons is scarcely entertainable; they will have enough to do in taking Paris. I can well believe that they will occupy Rouen, Orleans, etc., in order to provision their forces; but the distance is so great between their position and Lyons that it would take no little time for an army to reach it. I blush for my country at these panics which are seizing all the big towns, forming, as they do, a counterpart to the presumption of generals. The towns see the Prussians everywhere, the generals have never seen them till they were close on the top of their armies."

In the last lines Mother Marie Eugénie hit off to a nicety the military situation. France had some splendid soldiers: to wit MacMahon, Trochu and others too many to enumerate, and the best infantry in the world; but she had no great General. Moltke, with his profound knowledge of strategy, backed by the "Man of blood and iron", Bismarck, by his lightning blows delivered with machine-like precision and force, completely shattered the *moral* of the French armies, so that he was able to drive them before him like a flock of sheep.

Lyons, as the Mother General foresaw, escaped the horrors of war, and the community of the Assumption remained unmolested in their convent on the heights of Sainte-Foy. But Mgr Mermillod having offered a

refuge to the noviceship at a town called Sacconex-sur-Arve, not far from Geneva, Mother Thérèse Emmanuel availed herself of it, with the novices under her charge, during the winter of this year. They had much to suffer from privations of all kinds, but Mother Thérèse Emmanuel never ceased to remind them that it was their part to plead for their country by prayer and sacrifice. "How can you complain of anything," she said to them, "when your brothers are shedding their blood on the battle-field? Should you not rather account yourselves happy to be able to share their privations and their sufferings?"

The Mother General, re-assured as to the safety of the noviciate, seems to have redoubled her prayers and her motherly solicitude with regard to the community at Auteuil. In a letter to Mother Marie Seraphine (which never reached her as Paris was already invested by the enemy), she wrote: "I am longing more to get news of you than of anyone. I fear very much that fighting is going on in your vicinity. Put a statue of our Lady on the Tower, it will protect you. Heavens! how sad at heart one is. The Papal States invaded: the terrible misfortunes of Sedan, Strasbourg, Metz, Toul; the unfortunate prisoners; the fury let loose against religion by her enemies; and then anxiety about what may happen to you. We are praying for you with all our hearts, and asking of our Sisters in Heaven to protect you. As the one thing we long for is news of you, and to be able to give you ours, write letters which can be read by everyone, as there may be great difficulties with regard to sending letters as well as receiving them."

From the 15th of September to the conclusion of the siege four months later, no letters reached Auteuil from the Mother General. She, however, received letters from Mother Marie Seraphine by baloon-post.

The ambulance from that time was never empty. We read in the "Military records" of the siege of

Paris under the heading of " Ambulance of the convent of the Assumption, Auteuil " : " This convent is served by the Sisters of the Assumption, has a hundred beds, which are always full. Dr Malhéné, the local physician, has charge of the medical department. The chaplain gives conferences to the convalescents on history, geography, science, and religion, which are followed by them with lively interest. The convent had been previous to the war an excellent house of education." One of the Sisters told a visitor that, " first, the soul, then the body having been attended to, after that the mind has to be considered."

The wounded whom Providence had led to Auteuil were not long in that atmosphere of piety and charity before returning to God. Thus the Sisters left in charge had much consolation in their trials ; and Mother Marie Séraphine's letters to the Mother General breathe nothing so much as love of God and resignation to His Will. Meanwhile the latter was making superhuman but unavailing efforts to break through the " iron wall " (as she calls it) which encircled Paris. In a letter dated the 6th of December the superior of Auteuil writes to beg for a telegram. " Do you know, dear Mother, that many telegrams reach Paris ? If you would be so good as to send us one it would make us very happy. . . . We have never had to interrupt our regular life here ; we always say the Office. We shall truly be in Bethlehem for Christmas. I trust that our poverty and isolation will bring us many graces. The Sisters are cheerful, devoted, and have no fear. When the cannons are going all day our hearts are saddened on account of the poor victims, and those days we pray with still greater fervour. As for me I can do nothing else."

The good Mother had indeed reason to say they were sharing with our Lord the poverty of Bethlehem ; for the community was suffering both from cold and hunger. The price of bread and food of every descrip-

tion, and still more of fuel, was portentous, meat—even horse-meat—was an unheard of luxury, and the small quantity of bread doled out daily was hardly enough to keep body and soul together. Still when Christmas came it brought with it much innocent joy, to the wounded soldiers as well as to their nurses; and there was nothing that the latter left undone to make the feast a happy as well as a holy one to those under their care.

In the journal of events kept by the superior we read that all the soldiers, with one exception only, assisted at Mass on Christmas Day, and went to their duties. Mass was sung accompanied by organ and violin, and followed by a very beautiful sermon preached by Fr. Picard, which had only one fault, the soldiers said, namely, that it was too short. "After Mass Brother Jules conducted them to the great parlour, where, for the first time that winter, a fire was burning. They were invited to be seated, and refreshments of hot wine, biscuits and cigars were handed round, the Sisters doing the honours of the little feast, and the pleasure and surprise of these poor fellows who were quite unprepared for it, may be easily imagined. In the evening there was again a reunion in the parlour of all the inmates of the ambulance round a Christmas tree. It was placed on a table, and nearly reached the ceiling. The candles and presents attached to it had a very pretty effect. Some of our soldiers had never seen one before, and joy was mixed with surprise when our chaplain drew lots, in which there were no blanks. Tobacco carried all the honours of the day, and a parcel of it (thanks to Fr. Picard) accompanied each gift."

A telegram from Mother Marie Eugénie at last reached the prisoners at Auteuil, on January 14th, and was hailed with universal joy. Fr. Picard writes in answer to it, and after describing the feelings with which it was greeted, continues: "It was dated the 22nd of November, but no matter, it told us you were

well, that all the houses of the Assumption were unmolested, that our letters had been received; so we were satisfied and we forgot the infernal cannonade which has been continually resounding in our ears since the 30th of December."

A fortnight later the news reached the provinces that Paris had surrendered. A letter from Fr. Picard will show with what feelings a peace, which was looked upon as one without honour, was received in the capital.

"My dear Mother,

The exasperation which has mastered us all is sufficiently manifested in the letter I have written to Fr. d'Alzon. To turn to less painful and more intimate details: the days during the siege succeeded one another tranquilly, the blessed Virgin protected us, no shells fell upon the convent, they even respected the grounds. We trust that the anarchists, if they triumph; the Prussians if they enter the city, will be as well disposed as the shells. We are expecting events of the greatest gravity to happen any day. The vote-taking is incredibly slow; and it is much to be feared that should the radicals triumph they will request Trochu, Jules Favre, etc., to take the road to Bordeaux, and give place to the Commune. Such being the condition of things, do not make haste to send Sisters to us. I would rather see the staff here diminished than increased. Let Heaven suffer violence. Let us lean on Him whom we have trusted, and who alone is strong. Alas! our Lord is blasphemed by those who ought to have recourse to Him. Let us make reparation to Him; let us pray and suffer. The time of trial is approaching. It may finish quickly for us, but it will last long for France." He ends by saying, "Let us be saints."

During the interval of nearly six weeks which elapsed between the capitulation of Paris and its capture by the

revolutionary party, Auteuil had begun to resume its normal aspect. The pupils to the number of five or six had returned. The Mother General was making arrangements for departure, when she received a letter from Mother Marie Séraphine dated March 19th announcing the dreaded news.

"My dear Mother,

We are since yesterday in full revolution. Two generals have been shot by the mutineers. We hear simultaneously the tocsin, the call to arms and the cannons on Montmartre. The Commune has made itself mistress of the Bank of France, of all the courts of Justice and of the Town Hall, in short, of all the public offices. So far no pillaging has taken place. . . . I repeat I am in no fear; and if I had been alone I should not have minded; the thought of what may happen to our Sisters is what disturbs me, for it is impossible to dissimulate the fact that the situation is a grave one. A trifle may amend it, but may also aggravate it. We pray and we hope. I implore of you, dearest Mother, do not make yourself unhappy again about us. Our good God will protect us to the end, and if danger appears we shall disperse. What a comfort it is to think that you are far from here." A little later she again implores her not to be anxious about them. Mother Marie Eugénie replies: "I cannot say that I am not anxious; but I have confidence in God and I have recourse to prayer."

It was the season of Lent, and on Wednesday in Holy Week, April 5th, the news reached Auteuil that the Jesuits' house had been looted and the Fathers imprisoned. The same fate overtook the Dominicans. The insurgents had also seized the person of the Archbishop of Paris, and consigned him, as well as several priests (amongst others the Abbé Deguerry) to the Conciergerie as hostages. On Maundy Thursday the superior was informed that her convent was on the

list of those from which perquisitions would be required. "This," she writes, "did not prevent our watching in turn before the Blessed Sacrament in the Sepulchre. What a night it was! Terrible, and yet so consoling. We guarded our Saviour, and He guarded us—like the sentinels at His tomb. Never did Maundy Thursday appear so like that of the Passion."

All through the months of April and May the bombardment continued, and the convent at Auteuil was for a long time under a cross fire, between the artillery of the Commune on the heights round Paris and the army under MacMahon advancing from Versailles. Shells fell into the grounds in numbers, and on the 8th of May a warning was given by a shell bursting close to the house to take refuge in the basement. It was well that the nuns did so, for on the 10th another shell fell on the refectory, where it burst, and caused great damage. Providentially, however, no lives were lost. The following day a chief constable with thirty men under him arrived at Auteuil and summoned the superior to the door, "You have armed men" he said "in hiding here, and they have been seen firing on our National Guards. They have also been seen to make signals from the top of the tower to the army at Versailles." No attention was paid to the denials, and the men searched every hole and corner of the premises before retiring. A few days later a whole corps under Lannes took possession of the convent under the same plea. This was of course a signal for more requisitions. This time the nuns were told that they were gravely compromised, and that they were sentenced to internment in two rooms till further orders. This imprisonment in their own house did not last long. Two Polish ladies, friends of the Assumption, exerted their influence with General Dombrowski, who was one of the leaders of the Commune, to set them free. After encountering various obstacles—one being the difficulty of moving

a paralysed Sister, another from counter-orders which stopped their departure just as they were making good their escape—all the community arrived safely at St Denis. There they were given shelter and a warm welcome from the nuns of a Congregation fitly called that of our Lady of Compassion.

The Commune was now approaching its fall; the last use it made of its power was to put to death—an act worthy of barbarians—Mgr Darboy, Archbishop of Paris and the other heroic priests who shared his captivity, whom they had imprisoned with the object of wreaking their vengeance on them in case of their defeat. Mother Marie Séraphine writes on the 25th under the impression of all these horrors: "Paris is burning; during the day we see thick columns of smoke, and tongues of fire at night. We required a lesson: God has given it to us. May He mercifully allow us to profit by it. I care not for the monuments which are being destroyed; all my regrets are for our brave soldiers, who, on returning from fighting against the enemy from without have lost their lives in the streets of Paris. I ask of God to preserve Notre Dame and the Sainte-Chapelle to us. Paris, they say, is a dreadful spectacle of blood and flames. O justice of God! the great city is chastised indeed, and many are the victims."

On the following day Fr. Picard writes to the Mother General: "The cannonading has ceased, the revolutionary party is completely beaten, and Paris breathes amidst its ruins. The Sisters cannot return yet; the gates are closed against everyone. I will go and fetch them at St Denis, and will write and let you know afterwards when it will be possible for you to return. I do not dare to propose to you to see the convent as it is; I am setting people to work to save whatever it is possible to save from the havoc wrought by the war. Let us thank God that all the losses have been material ones. The holy Eucharist has not been profaned

Auteuil, The Cloisters.

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inside our walls: that is a great consolation. Let us pray and go to work again with greater fervour and confidence than ever."

The Sisters were able to return to Auteuil before the end of May; some on the 27th, the rest on the 30th. On the 2nd of June the Mother General arrived, almost unexpectedly, from Lyons, where she had spent the last few weeks of the war. It was nearly a year since she had quitted the Mother-house of her Congregation; and in what a state she found it! But, we are told, her heart had no room for any feelings except those of thanksgiving. Her daughters were restored to her; they had risen to the full height of the occasion and to their responsibilities; the souls of all were strengthened and purified by the trials they had undergone. No wonder that she rejoiced and thanked God.

CHAPTER XXV

"All our actions should be but the effects of the love that animates us. And as in the Temple of Solomon there was nothing but what was made of gold or covered with gold, so let there be nothing in you which is not either an act, or an effect of the love of God."

RODRIGUEZ.

THE Mother General took advantage of the leisure afforded by the summer vacation in 1871 to summon to Auteuil all the superiors of the different houses, in order to review the past with them and discuss the future. In these daily meetings with the superiors, she put before them her views, which were always of the most practical nature and drawn from her own experience, of the aims of the Congregation and of the duties of those at the head of the various departments: such as that of first mistress of the school, that of Procuratrix, and so forth. We are told that in these conferences two leading ideas seemed ever before her: one was to maintain the spirit of regularity and obedience in her daughters, and the other to make large allowances for character and situations, so as not to crush their initiative by absorbing everything into her own hands: in a word, to encourage growth and progress and the development of character on the right lines, wherever she found it.

It was only in the winter of this year that whilst she was at her convent at Nîmes the nuns took notes of the conferences given by her. A few extracts from these will show her aims as Foundress of the Congregation of the Assumption, and the means she recommended to her daughters for attaining them.

"When I think what should be the chief characteristic of our Institute, I am always brought face to face

with the thought that in all things and in all ways we should live in adoration and zeal for the rights of God. You are Sisters of the Assumption. This mystery, which belongs more to heaven than to earth, is a mystery of adoration. In rising up to earth from heaven, our Blessed Lady went to pay God a sovereign homage. The whole life of Mary is adoration. Her actions were not only pure and blameless; they were full of all holiness, and gave glory to God by an intensity of love, of reverence, of humble service unequalled by any other creature. If there has ever been an adorer in spirit and in truth, it is certainly our Blessed Lady. And when she left this world and her fulness of grace was crowned with glory, she went up to heaven to live everlastingly in adoration and love."

Commenting on the words of St Paul: "There is laid up for me a crown of justice," she asked: "What is a crown? All that God has given to the creature. Can we say that the moral virtues, that the powers of understanding, of acting, of feeling, are a crown? Yes, because all that is a gift. All that God has given us in heart and mind, in nature and grace, in the safeguarding of natural virtue, all that is a crown. If we have not fallen into sin, if we have kept our baptismal innocence, that is a gift of God and the fairest of all crowns. If we have kept virginity of soul and body, it is because God has watched over us from our childhood and surrounded us by His graces; but this virginity is a gift of God. I could say the same of the other virtues: faith, hope, charity, are gifts. Man accepts them, it is true; he opens his heart to receive them. It is the same of poverty, obedience, gentleness and other good inclinations; they are treasures which come from God and draw down His love, for God eternally crowns His own gifts, provided we accept them. Our crown, then, will be made up of natural and supernatural gifts. Perfect adoration means that we also cast our crown before the feet of God and give

up to Him all that we are so that He may make use of us as He wills and when He wills."

On another occasion she said: "We should be as the Ancients of the Apocalypse 'who fell down and adored Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the Throne'."

The second character of the spirit of the Assumption should be Faith; the love of Faith. "I do not know if my words have been sufficiently strong and clear to make you understand how essential the spirit of faith is to that of adoration. St Augustine says that we ought to reverence the word of God as we do His Sacred Body; He gives Himself to us in His word as He does in the Blessed Sacrament. You know that the Book of the Gospels is incensed at Mass, as are the elements of bread and wine; you know also that it is said of our Blessed Lady with regard to Our Lord's mysteries that she kept these things and pondered them in her heart. Do as she did: reverence all that has to do with the word of God. Long for as great a knowledge as possible of divine truth. The more your soul thirsts for this order of knowledge, the more you desire to become learned in the doctrine of the saints, to know what the Church teaches, what she recommends and what she blesses, the more truly you will be Religious of the Assumption."

In another place she warned them against reading dangerous books in order to combat false doctrines. "Make no mistake, my dear Sisters, one must nourish one's soul on light in order to give light, one should never nourish it on error in order to combat error."

"A soul which is very Catholic and keeps to the straight road from truth to God, goes much further in holiness. Nothing leads better to perfection. Choose the books of canonized saints and those especially recommended by the Church. Only give your confidence to priests who are very loyal to Rome and good theologians. Whether they appeal to you or not, does

not matter, but that their teaching should be sound. Otherwise, there may be danger, even though their words and their ways appear to be holy. I wish you to be thoroughly convinced that error, once you let it into the mind, increases and multiplies."

The third characteristic of the spirit of the Assumption is the love of Jesus Christ. One might call it the first, for it is fundamental. Through Him we go to God and we adore His rights. Through Him divine truth comes to us and we receive it with faith and thanksgiving. The love of Jesus Christ is the ground of all religious life, the secret of every vocation. It is for Jesus Christ we have left all things, it is Him whom we wish to follow in His life of poverty, obedience and sacrifice. " There is nothing in all that," says Mother Marie Eugénie, " which is peculiar to us. But side by side with this love which is the foundation of all religious life, there may be some special devotion, some expression of it proper to the particular institute. That is not our case. Ours should be that love which in the very beginning our Lord Jesus Christ enkindled in His Church. That is one of the splendid things we find in St Augustine. The heart of that great doctor is as wide as the Church—nothing peculiar or exclusive."

To quote the whole of Mother Marie Eugénie's conference on Jesus Christ would take up too much space ; but we cannot omit the following : " Each one of you when you entered, ought to have consecrated your life to the perfect knowledge, love and service of our Lord Jesus Christ and to making Him known, loved and served. The real difference between Christian and religious life is this *perfection.* There are not two Gospels. The same Gospel which is given to all Christians is given to religious ; but these make it their own with greater love and count nothing too hard, too irksome in the Master's service. . . .

" As Religious of the Assumption you ought to tend towards the perfection to which you are called, a true

and intimate union with Jesus Christ. This is the fruit of long toil. Union is not attained without trouble. It is only by much labour that the soul becomes recollected and entirely dependent on Our Lord. God can bring you thither in a moment by the prayer of quiet or union, but afterwards your work is needed to keep this grace. . . . After the knowledge of Jesus Christ comes His service. This should be work sanctified by obedience, and obedience as applied to labour. Work throughout the religious life is regulated by obedience. The service given to God, the Church and souls will take a particular form according to the ends of the Institute, and the works to which it is dedicated.

"For one that end or object will be preaching; for another singing the divine praises; for others the care of the sick, visiting the poor, the education of children. To give Jesus Christ to children by a Christian education is preeminently an alms: it is the part we have taken; that is the service we render to Jesus Christ—our ministry in the Church: we must never forget this: Of all the marks of holiness that which I most earnestly wish you is that you should be so lost in the Will of God, that always and in all things you should love, seek, and bless this Divine Will. This leads to self-abandonment in God's hands. It is the surest, the most full and perfect union that there can be between God and His creature. Then He can truly say of her those beautiful words *Voluntas mea in ea.*

"'Adveniat regnum tuum' is one of our mottos. You should join with it the other petition of the *Pater Noster*: '*Fiat voluntas tua.*' Be faithful and earnest in praying also: *Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in coelo et in terra.* The life of the Angels and Saints in Heaven is to love, reverence, adore, and continually fulfil the Will of God. And you who in your life of ministry are, as it were, the visible guardian angels of others,

ought, like the angels to keep in the presence of God, ready to move at the least sign of His Will. A soul thus obedient has become all service, love, adoration, and even on earth has about her something of that heavenly city to which we belong through the Assumption of our Mother, Mary."

We will conclude these extracts with what Mother Marie Eugénie says about the love of the written word of God and devotion to His saints: "Love the Holy Gospel; read it with the deepest reverence, firmly believing that in its simple speech is uttered the very Word of God. Our Lord came down upon earth, He conversed with men, and He suffered that through the merits of His Precious Blood, we might have strength to act upon the principles of the Gospel, and realise its ideals in our lives. You may observe that the great characteristic of our devotions is their simplicity. Thus throughout all our devotions there is a singleness of aim which seeks Jesus Christ wherever He is to be found, in the Blessed Sacrament, in the Church, and in the Gospel, so as to know and love Him better." She specially recommended devotion to the evangelical saints: "Our Lord lived in their midst; they took care of Him during His mortal life; they were pioneers of His kingdom in souls." Besides the apostles she would have them practise devotion to the martyrs who founded the Church with their blood, to the Doctors who taught the truth, to the missionaries who spread the Christian faith, to the founders of religious Orders who were endowed with special graces.

"Our daily recitation of the Divine Office makes it easy for us to know and love the Saints, to have a comprehensive and enlightened devotion to them. The Office is the language of the Church, and puts us in communion with the Saints in Heaven and on earth. Through the Office our devotion becomes that of the Church, founded on her teaching, wide as her universality, rich with her tradition,—the quintessence of

all the praise that has been given to God from the early days of the Church, even from the times of the Synagogue and the Patriarchs. I think that one of the characteristics of your devotion ought to be to try to praise God in all things. I should like to take for the motto of our active life the words '*Adveniat regnum Tuum*,' and for our interior life the words '*Laus Deo*'."

We select one from a number of letters addressed by the Mother General to her daughters, as an example of her gifts of direction and discernment of spirits. A young superior, lately raised to that office, complained that two members of the community appeared to her to be led wholly by nature and not by grace. "There is in what you say," she answers, "a proof of inexperience upon which I should like to make a few remarks: '*entirely led by nature*.' No, not one of the souls entrusted to you is, happily, in that state. The divine grace which all have received in Baptism may be less developed in some than in others; but it lives, I may venture to say it reigns in all, though in some souls imperfectly. The essential signs of supernatural life are, faith, hope, supernatural love, prayer and the fear of God. It seems to me you could never have found amongst us a soul wanting in those principal traits which are marks of divine election and salvation. Let me draw a lesson from this, that one of the most useful views a superior can have of her Sisters, is to look upon them as souls destined to eternal glory of whom she has charge in order to adorn them for their divine Spouse. She will derive a greater respect and at the same time a greater courage from this view, and a confidence which will fortify and raise up the souls committed to her care. For her own part, she will be on her knees before them, and she will find the strength to ask any sacrifice from them, whether to make or to destroy. You will perhaps ask me if you should look upon them as being in a state of perfection?

Assuredly not. You may be distressed at seeing so many purely natural impulses in them, and to see these dominating their actions; but you should not allow yourself to be astonished at them: it is against this that I warn you. Be desirous that your daughters should be wholly perfect; work gently with this object, try to make them attain to every virtue in its perfection. Never can they soar to greater heights than are fitting for the Spouse to Whom they belong. But take account also of the other side of the question; do not lose sight of the inborn instincts of our poor human nature. Be wise and kind enough to give them full credit for the virtues which they possess, which are a miracle in themselves when our corrupt nature is taken into consideration. Believe that it is a great talent to be able to see the best side of others, if together with this we have not the weakness which makes us delude ourselves about their defects. It is only too easy for us who are superiors, and who are constantly coming into contact with those whom we have to lead, to recognise their defects; we should, therefore, on the other hand, take trouble to find out the virtues and good qualities which lie below defects which give us annoyance; for it is in these (which we shall always find in every religious soul) that we must seek the means to make her advance in perfection.

"Finally, my child, let us form a just idea of our functions. They do not consist in living with saintly souls in a terrestial paradise. Our Saviour has deigned to love us enough to confide a much more meritorious task to us: the charge of receiving imperfect souls, in order that we may give them up to Him, at the end of life in a state of perfection, or at least as near that state as is possible. Thus it happens very frequently that when a soul attains to perfection our Lord takes her to the eternal nuptials; and then He sends us others, still full of defects, so that we may have the

honour of working and suffering so that the ' new man ' may be formed in them."

On no occasions did Mother Marie Eugénie show that she was even more Mother than Superior and Foundress in her relations with her daughters than when they were on their death-beds. We read in the " Fondatrice " that she did all that she possibly could to find herself by their bedside at that dread moment, and that she never returned from them without drawing some profound lesson from what she had witnessed for the survivors. " Remember, my Sisters," she said on one occasion after having been present at a very edifying death, " that we show only in illness virtues which we have acquired in health, so that not a moment should be lost in adorning our souls with humility, purity and simplicity. This is what Sister Marie Claire has done, so I have no fear for her. In spite of it, however, she was not without dread of appearing before God, and when I asked her what caused it, she said : ' I have served our good God so badly ! ' This belief was so firmly imprinted in her mind that I found nothing more comforting to say to her than to recommend her to make use of the words of the Prodigal Son : ' Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am not worthy to be called Thy son.' See, my daughters, if we have not this foundation of humility, we shall never reach much perfection, neither a great love of God, nor great charity for our neighbour, nor great simplicity."

The great art of Christian life is to learn how to die well : one could say that nowhere have souls mastered it better than in the Assumption. Mother Marie Eugénie's daughters learnt from her how to face death in the bosom of their Congregation as the crowning act of their religious life. It was in this light that death was looked upon by Sister Marie Félix. Speaking of her after witnessing her death, Mother Marie Eugénie said : " Our Saviour bestowed a very remark-

able and singular grace on this good lay Sister ; for I look upon what she, in her simplicity, called a dream as a divine intimation. The Blessed Virgin came to call her—to make her a sign. 'It was,' she said, 'in truth the same who had called me to a religious life.' How was it that she saw her ? Was it a dream ? Was it a special grace of God ? I know not ; but she saw the Blessed Virgin at the moment of her call to God's service, and our Lady came on her death-bed to make her a sign, signifying that her task was finished and calling her to a better life. Our merciful God, Who gives us examples in our departed Sisters, gave us one to-day in this good lay Sister. What should we conclude from it, my dear Sisters ? What is it that most draws down upon us God's grace ? Is it not a life made up of ordinary actions ? is it not of a life of humble labour, of the pains one takes out of obedience, of forgetfulness of self, of charity towards others, of humility, simplicity and application to prayer ? Fr. Lacordaire has said that 'never does the crown of eternity fall more straight from Heaven than upon a head which has grown grey under the burden of a life of humble toil.' "

CHAPTER XXVI

"But O, Thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Thou art, of all Thy gifts, Thyself the crown!
Give what Thou canst, without Thee we are poor,
And with Thee, rich, take what Thou wilt away."

COWPER.

THE first Foundation made by the Mother General after the Franco-Prussian war was in New Caledonia. It was started at the pressing appeal of a devoted friend of the Congregation, Mgr Vitte. As it came to an untimely end after the space of little more than two years, a few words only will be necessary to describe it. Mother Marie Eugénie did not undertake it without much misgiving, but the holy Bishop (for he had then been recently appointed to the See of Noumoea) overcame all her objections by representing the work for souls that might be done among the poor natives in his diocese. He had already started an orphanage in which eighty negro children were being brought up by a tertiary of the Marist Congregation, named Sister Marie de la Croix. To supplement her labours he asked for two lay Sisters and for a choir nun to be sent in charge of the expedition. The little party arrived at the port of Noumoea in the beginning of the year 1874, and proceeded thence to St Louis, which was to be the scene of their labours. Trials attended them from the beginning. Sister Marie Rosalie, one of the lay Sisters, fell ill as soon as she arrived, and died in the following August after being devotedly nursed by the Sisters of St Joseph. To judge from her letters to her Superior, Sister Marie Apollonie, the surviving lay Sister, must have had a true missionary spirit. She devoted herself heart and soul to her little black

charges, making nothing of the trials and discomforts of her life, and full of the joy of devoting herself to the work of evangelising the natives. Her labours in the mission field, however, were to be of short duration. She was overtaken, whilst returning from a short journey, by a tropical hurricane which struck her to the ground, and at the same time the belfry of the chapel near which she was standing, fell upon her leg and broke it. She was carried to the hospital and put under the charitable care of the same Sisters who had nursed Sister Marie Rosalie ; but she did not long survive the accident. Her leg had to be amputated and she died shortly afterwards. The Superior of this nursing Sisterhood, in her letter to Mother Marie Eugénie acquainting her with the sad news, describes the resignation, courage and true piety with which her daughter endured her sufferings. And she ends by saying : " If your two fervent Sisters had come to New Caledonia for no other reason than to give edification by their last moments, they would have amply fulfilled our Lord's designs in sending them here."

The death of the lay Sisters was followed soon afterwards by the return of the choir nun to Europe.

Almost at the same time that these events were taking place at the Antipodes, by a wholly fortuitous occurrence, the door was opened to an extension of the Congregation nearer home. Early in May 1873, leave was asked and granted for a Spanish priest to celebrate a Requiem Mass for a member of the Montpensier family in the chapel at Auteuil. This led to the Duke and Duchess of Montpensier making Mother Marie Eugénie's acquaintance and entrusting the education of their daughter Mercedes to her care. For three years Mercedes attended the classes of the school at Auteuil as a day-boarder, and this intercourse between pupil and mistresses ripened into a warm affection between them. On

returning to Spain, Mercedes writes to her former mistress at the Assumption in Paris to say what joy she had in seeing some of her old friends there, and that even the sight of the well-known habit gave her pleasure. The Foundation in Madrid, that of the Colegio Real de Santa Isabel, was made in 1876, and was followed later on by one at the Colegio Real de Nuestra Señora de Loreto; both were founded for the daughters of officers and were under the protection of the Crown. Mercedes preserved an affectionate remembrance of her friends at Auteuil for the remainder of her short life; and when her marriage was arranged with the reigning King, Alfonso XII, she lost no time in announcing it to her '*Mère Chérie*' as she calls her.

Mother Marie Eugénie in answering it, perhaps called to mind the advice given by the holy Visitation nun, Denise de Martignat, which was that in writing to royal personages it was well always to put in a word of advice or warning: because, she was wont to say, kings and queens only hear what flatters them. There is no one to tell them of the justice of God and His judgments.

"My dear Princess,

We have heard rumours for some time with much interest of your elevation to the throne of Spain. I was about to write to you when I received your affectionate letter and your portrait. You cannot doubt of the share we take in your joy, nor of that you will have in our prayers. All who are acquainted with King Alfonso speak of his noble heart and remarkable intelligence, of the elevation of his character and of his charm. You, Madame, above others, will profit by these fine qualities; I share in your belief that they will be the source of your happiness.

"Permit an old mother to say that in becoming Queen of a pre-eminently Catholic nation, God will

Assumption Convent, Madrid.

Assumption Convent, San Sebastian.

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expect of you that you should go on increasing in faith and in virtue, and so recall the holy queens and princesses of which your noble family has given such numerous examples. Many pitfalls will be set on your path, dear Madame. You who are so pure and sincere will encounter hearts less sincere than yours. May God bless you, keep you, preserve you happy and faithful. Such are the earnest wishes of a heart which is truly yours in Jesus Christ.

" Sister Marie Eugénie de Jésus."

Six months after their marriage in January 1878, Alphonso was left a widower ; and all Spain mourned with him for the loss of a bride who, even in that short time, had endeared herself to the hearts of the people. His second wife, the Archduchess Marie Christine, apparently inherited her predecessor's love of the Congregation. She showed herself both a friend and a benefactor to the two houses which were founded later in Spain ; one at S. Sebastian in 1882 and the other Nuestra Señora de Loreto in 1893.

The Assumption, in the meantime, had been throwing out fresh offshoots in France and England. Mgr de Cabrières, who had ever shown a special friendship to the Congregation, as soon as he was appointed to the See of Montpellier, invited them to found a house in his Cathedral city. It was started, like so many others, on a very small scale in a crowded part of the town, with the special objects of Perpetual Adoration and giving facilities for retreats. A few years later a school was added, and the Community moved into a fine property with a large garden in the outskirts of Montpellier. This was followed by three other Foundations in France : one in the Rue Général-Foy in Paris was started with the view of giving courses of instruction to children of all ages, and conferences to young girls who had finished their education. A

foundation was made at Cannes about the same time; this, besides the usual objects of Perpetual Adoration and the work of receiving ladies who wished to make retreats, had a Poor School attached to it which became in a very short time very numerously attended. Mother Marie Eugénie rejoiced at being able, whenever it was possible, to annex a Poor School to her houses. This work, which may be called an Evangelical one, has been a source of benediction to many of the convents of the Assumption: for instance, in those in Richmond, London, Sedan, Madrid, San Sebastian and Malaga. She had also a devotion to putting them under the special protection of our Lady: thus the house in Paris was dedicated to our Lady of Salvation, the one at Cannes to our Lady of Perpetual Succour. But there is one convent which may be said to have been specially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, which is the one at Lourdes. Mgr Langenieux, the then Bishop of Tarbes, pressed her to make it, and Mother Thérèse Emmanuel used all her influence to second his wishes, pleading that, "Our place is there: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are the two mysteries of the glory of the Blessed Virgin. They need and complete one another." Though at first the Mother General saw difficulties in the way of the Foundation, she yielded at last to the persuasions of her holy Assistant; but she was frequently heard to say that it was Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's doing; without her she would never have made the Foundation. It was started in 1882.

Two additional Foundations were made in England about the same period; one at Ramsgate in 1878, and another at Sidmouth, under the patronage of our Lady Help of Christians, in 1882.

We are now approaching the term of the holy Foundress's active life. It was ushered in—as is so frequently the case—by the loss of most of the friends

and the supports of her early life. As Mme Swetchine says, so well: "Fleur à fleur on perd la couronne de la vie." The first to go was Fr d'Alzon. He died in November, 1880, at a moment when the Government of the day had decided on closing his religious house at Nîmes and sending his sons into exile. The blow of seeing his work destroyed was too much for him in the frail state of his health; but his heart was full of confidence for its future. "God is Master," he said. "Be good religious. I am leaving you, but my heart will always be with you." His death was deeply felt by Mother Marie Eugénie. He was the last of those who had served as a spiritual guide to her, and no one had been of greater help to her in the early days of the Congregation. Speaking of him on one occasion to her daughters, she said: "What I shall evermore see in Fr d'Alzon is his love of our Lord, his devotion to the Church and his love for souls. And then, too, he loved my soul and did it good."

Two years later, Sister Marie Thérèse of the Incarnation—Josephine de Commarque in the world—died at Auteuil on the 18th of April, 1882. Though not the first to join the Congregation, she was the first whom Mother Marie Eugénie greeted as Sister. She was seventy years of age, forty-two years of which had been spent in the religious life. In the circular which the Mother General issued at her death to the houses of the Order, she says that she left the memory of a holy life, and an unbounded devotion to her superiors and her Congregation. Obedience and zeal for the glory of God shone in all her actions, and under every circumstance of her life. She was at all times, and wherever she was sent, a firm support to her superiors and a source of union to her Sisters, and was in truth a soul entirely given up to the love of God.

A still greater blow menaced Mother Marie Eugénie in 1883, when Mother Thérèse Emmanuel was brought

to the point of death by an attack of inflammation of the lungs. She recovered for the time, but was never restored to health, and her office of Novice-Mistress had to be transferred to Mother Marie Séraphine. She was given the consolation before she died of seeing the Congregation which she loved so much, and had done so much to build up, receive the formal act of approbation of the Holy See. A General Chapter was summoned in August 1886 under the presidency of Mgr d'Hulst, when the Constitutions were once more revised and corrected and the opinion of all the superiors of the different houses was asked upon them and upon the government of the Mother General. All that remained then was to obtain their ratification by the Holy See. It was necessary, in order to effect this, to support the petition of the Congregation with the names of influential prelates. The Archbishop of Paris, the Cardinals of Rheims and Toulouse, the Archbishops of Lyons and Bordeaux, seven French bishops, Cardinal Manning and three English bishops, two Cardinals and three Spanish bishops signified their approval of the Assumption, and their desire that the Holy Father should give it the crowning grace of his approbation.

A passage from a letter from Mgr de Cabrières, Bishop of Montpellier, to the Cardinal Prefect of the S. Congregation of Bishops and Regulars shows the esteem in which he held it. Referring to the Foundress, he writes: "Thanks to the personal gifts with which God endowed her; thanks to the generous dispositions which she met with in the first companions who associated themselves with her in her work: finally, thanks to the happy influence exerted by eminent men such as the Abbé Combalot, Mgr de la Bouillerie, Mgr Gerbet, and Cardinal Gousset on Mother Marie Eugénie's large and open mind, she has fully attained the end which she proposed to herself. This end was the creation of a religious Institute

founded on the traditional and immutable basis of docility to the Holy See; of a profound veneration of the ancient monastic observances; of devotion to the sacred rules of Roman liturgy, adapting them nevertheless to the particular conditions of modern society. It was obviously difficult to fulfil the double task, and to realise completely the double programme: to retain from the past its systematised regularity and all that it contains of what is most favourable for the growth of sanctity, and to unite with this a certain measure of wise modern liberty in order to bring it into line with the habits of our day. In my opinion the attempt has been a success, and, as far as I am able to judge, is worthy of the encouragement of the supreme Pontiff and Pastor. I can support my contention, which in itself is not worth much, by the opinion of an illustrious prelate, whose humble desciple I am, and by whose side I have passed all my sacerdotal life: Mgr Plantier, Bishop of Nîmes. He had the highest respect for the nuns of the Assumption. By their life of prayer, mental and vocal, by the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, by their faithful recitation of the Roman breviary, it appeared to him that they re-established the highest type of the nun who devotes herself to teaching, but whose spiritual life is constantly renewed by prayer and the sacred psalmody." Mgr de Cabrières ends by expressing a wish that, acting under the advice of the Sacred Congregation, the Sovereign Pontiff would deign to approve definitely the Rules and Constitutions of the Augustinian Sisters of the Assumption. The Constitutions were then submitted to a searching examination, and they were found to contain nothing which was not conformable to the spirit of the Church, and expedient to leading souls to perfection. The only objection raised was against the daily recitation of the divine Office, which it was said was incompatible with teaching. Cardinal Parocchi, who was to be made the

protector of the Congregation, supported the nuns in their aspiration to live, as he said, "by the Church's piety." Finally Cardinal Mermillod, who knew the importance which the Congregation attached to this privilege, clinched the matter by declaring that he knew these nuns. "To them the Office is what wings are to a bird: it enables them to soar."

The decree of approbation was signed on the 4th of April, 1888. No sooner had Mother Marie Eugénie received the news that her life's work had been confirmed and approved of by the Sovereign Pontiff, than she left Rome, whither she had gone to await the decree, and hurried back to France, so as to assist at the last moments of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel. Her presence was a source of great consolation to the dying nun, and the news which she brought came as an answer to many fervent prayers. Mother Thérèse Emmanuel could now sing with holy Simeon: "Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, in peace." She gave up her holy soul to God on the 2nd of May 1888 at Cannes, having received the last Sacraments on the previous day.

Mother Marie Eugénie whilst closing her eyes was heard to say: "Dear Mother, this is the last service I shall render you, closing those eyes which have so often enlightened my pathway through life." In announcing the sad news of their loss to the superiors of the Congregation, she summed up the leading characteristic of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel in the words: "You know what we all owe to the ardent love she had for all that appertained to the service of our Divine Saviour. Her life was consumed in it."

A telegram announcing Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's death arrived at Auteuil at a moment when Mgr Gay, Bishop of Anthédon, was about to address a meeting of Children of Mary; accordingly he made the saintly religious the text of his exhortation.

"When," he said, "a soul has no other intention than to give glory to God, when the love of God reigns in her, inspires her and fills her, then the Will of God is accomplished in that soul as it is accomplished in Heaven; *there* is true peace, true joy, the life of heaven begun on earth; there is the mutual repose of God in the creature and the creature in God. The religious whose death has just been announced lived in this manner. Yes! I, who was the confidant, the witness of her interior life for forty years, I can vouch for it, that it was thus she lived: in simple faith, true virtue, in poverty and obedience, in the love of the Church and of her doctrine."

When speaking at another time to the Community, he drew especial attention, for their edification, to the principles on which Mother Thérèse Emmanuel's spiritual life were founded, and on what may be called the grace proper to that life.

"I have come across many souls," he said, "since I had the grace of becoming a priest, but I am not aware that I have ever met one whose faith was so constant and so firm, or more fruitful and enlightened, in the sense that faith was the source of inspiration of her whole life. She was very pious, but her piety was founded on doctrine; her prayer, which reached great heights, and in which she was greatly favoured by God, was a doctrinal one. From certain points of view there were extraordinary things in her prayer; and yet fundamentally there was nothing extraordinary about it. The advice I gave her, on making myself acquainted with the lights which she received, was nothing else but the application of the maxims of the Gospel and of the Life of Jesus Christ. I search for the key to her devotions: the mystery of her life, and I find no other thing than the hidden life of our Lord. Jesus Christ was all in all to her—His life of adoration, union with and obedience to His Father. This life was put before her habitually, in its grandeur and

splendour ; and she entered into God's designs humbly and with great docility and with a willing heart, but not always without a struggle. She communicated in the Passion of Jesus Christ, in His agony and in His sacrifice. It was always Him, and nothing but Him. Hers was a soul that could be led by the Gospels only." He concluded by saying : " The interior life of the Assumption was her doing, and this she accomplished in profound and touching union with her Superior. They are your two Foundresses : St Peter and St Paul. St Peter remains always St Peter, but he is never separated from St Paul ; and Mother Thérèse Emmanuel was the St Paul of your Mother. She proclaimed to you the mystery of Christ ; her life and prayer were a commentary upon it. One was the head, the other the heart. It was she who gave you your training in the spiritual life, having been novice mistress nearly all her religious life, and those who succeeded her were formed by her."

No less striking and even more touching were the words spoken by the Mother General on her return to Auteuil to the community about one who was not only her dearly-loved daughter but also, in a sense, a second self.

She began by saying : " You all know, my dear daughters, what Mother Thérèse Emmanuel stood for in the Congregation ; how by her religious spirit, her labours, her devotedness and her faith, she founded this work. But there were other characteristics of hers which struck me even more ; and it is of these I should like to speak to you. The leading one was her humility and her obedience ; and what made this the more remarkable was that nature had endowed her with a loftiness of mind which was nearly allied to haughtiness. Her reasoning powers were such that she wished to know the why and wherefore of things, and her reason required to be satisfied before it submitted. With these interior dispositions, it is the more remark-

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able that she should have been wholly stripped of pride."

"The second characteristic of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel was," she said, "correspondence with divine grace. Our Lord led her by the way of the Cross and by great sufferings; and there, also, she allowed herself to be led by obedience. . . . She had a great gift of the love of God. She never had any other love. She was the type of what is said in our Constitutions, that nothing was in her heart which did not belong to Jesus Christ, or was not there in His name, by order of Him, or for love of Him. She possessed in the most eminent degree a virginity of heart and mind—the virginity of one who had never belonged to any one but to God. Her extreme generosity, her humility and her obedience were the causes of God's reign in her, and of her being the object of His plentiful graces; for I, who was acquainted with her interior life, can truly say that she was replenished with them. God had special designs for her, and He worked at their accomplishment till the end of her life. . . . A short time before her death she said to me: 'I have not done all that God asked of me. I have not accomplished all His designs.' I consoled her by saying, 'Even the saints themselves could not say, when they had arrived at the moment which you have now reached, that they had corresponded with all God's graces. The Blessed Virgin only realized to the full God's designs upon her, and in this she stands alone.'"

The body of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel was brought from Cannes to Auteuil, and deposited in a vault in the convent grounds. Mgr d'Hulst assisted at the Requiem Mass and interment, and preached the funeral sermon.

The jubilee of the Foundation of the Congregation of the Assumption was celebrated on the 28th of

August, 1888. The jubilee gift from all the houses took the form of a very beautiful altar. Mgr d'Hulst preached on the occasion from the text : *Vos estis lux, vos estis sal terrae.*

Mgr Richard, the Archbishop of Paris, came the same day to bless and congratulate the community ; and to complete the general rejoicings a telegram arrived from Cardinal Parocchi, conveying the Pope's blessing, and his own congratulations and good wishes for the Mother General, her daughters and their work. The General Chapter was held the same day. Mgr d'Hulst presided, Mother Marie Marguerite was elected Assistant and Mother Agnes Eugénie, Mistress of novices.

The jubilee of the school was held in April in the following year. It was the occasion of a great gathering of the former pupils of the Assumption, and one of them, who had attained to the dignity of being a grand-mother, presented a congratulatory address to the holy Foundress.

In the years that followed these events we can trace in the notes of retreat left by Mother Marie Eugénie not only the ever-increasing burden of years—one which was but natural—but the increasing weight of the Cross as shown by interior trials. She was passing through that process of purification common to all holy souls, in which, like the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles, she " sought Him whom her soul loved and found Him not." That the veil was lifted at times, however, there is evidence in the following passage from her note-book : " How grateful I am to God for having been able to make this retreat. My soul, which for some time has been a prey to anguish and disturbance, recovered its sense of the presence of Jesus in a meditation on St Peter's denial. I realised that our Lord, during the three years of His public life, had always loved him. He found fault with him ; He forgave him ; and He ever kept His confidence

in him. He was transfigured before him—as He also has been before me how many times in my life! Peter, to whom He was about to confide everything, could not watch an hour with Him; and then even when he was trying to follow Him, he denied Him. Jesus looked upon him: with what a look of love and sorrow! Peter neither followed Him on the Sorrowful Way, nor to Calvary. He wept, he trusted; and directly after His resurrection, Jesus confided the Church to his care.

"How many things Jesus has confided to me! What responsibilities, if I look upon them from the point of view of the confidence He has shown me, and of which I ought to make myself worthy. Yes! I am determined to have a *trusting* contrition. Yes, charged with my Saviour's work and with His interests, I can and I will labour, fortified with His look of love which has raised me up, to renounce myself, to vanquish that sensitiveness, those revolts, everything which comes of my natural inclinations. To carry out the work of Jesus I should strip myself, renounce myself, and mortify all that serves to nourish self-love. To speak the word of Jesus, I should only say what would be useful to my neighbour and do good. To use the influence of Jesus I should console all, be good to them and make them feel His presence. This is my mission, these are the duties of my office. Nothing purely personal should find entrance; nothing for ends which have reference to self, which would save me from a difficulty or an annoyance. I wish to take the sorrows which people may cause me, the words which may be said to me or of me, as coming from the hands of my Saviour, as part of His poverty, His humiliations and His sufferings, accepting them in a spirit of expiation and even more of love, trusting that they will bring Jesus to my soul and be for my good."

During the six years of active life which remained to the holy Foundress, between 1888 and 1894, much

was done for the development and extension of her Congregation. The first Foundation was in Rome for which she had prepared the way in her journey there in February, 1888. The school which was opened soon after the house was founded, enjoyed the privilege of being chosen for the education of the niece of Pope Leo XIII, Anna Lactizia Pecci, which was the cause of its receiving many special favours from him. Another foundation followed soon afterwards at Rouen, in the year 1889, at the special desire of Mgr Thomas, the administrator of the diocese. It was dedicated to our Lady of Good Counsel.

Two far-away foundations were asked for in 1890. One at Leon, where the Government of Nicaragua, being anxious to procure a French teaching Order, offered to pay the expenses of the nuns' journey and of the preliminary cost of their establishing themselves in that town. A party of nine Sisters—including lay Sisters—was sent out in August, 1892. Great success attended the schools, which were for both rich and poor. In 1902 they numbered two hundred scholars in each. This led to another Foundation at Santa-Aña in Salvador, in 1895.

In the same year that the Assumption established itself at Leon, the Queen of Spain invited the Mother General to found a college in the Phillippines at Manilla, where school teachers could be trained to teach all the schools in the Islands. The work was one which was likely to be productive of much good to souls, and Mother Marie of Perpetuel Secours and the nuns who accompanied her devoted themselves to it with a zeal which was crowned with signal success. This promising state of things lasted till the Phillippines passed into the hands of their American conquerors, when this, as well as many other Catholic institutions, had to be given up.[1] Two more Founda-

[1] It was only in the Pontificate of Pius X that by his express command the house at Manilla was re-opened as an English speaking school. Another foundation was also made at this time at Ilo-Ilo.

Assumption Convent, Manila.

Assumption Convent, Philadelphia.

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tions were made in the year 1892. One, at Boulouris-sur-mer, a watering place between Cannes and St Raphael, was due to the generosity of Mdle. Deseilligny, a friend of the Assumption, as well as a devoted friend of the poor. She made over an orphanage of a hundred children, together with a fine property, to the Congregation, asking their assistance to carry on this excellent work. The nuns took possession on the 15th of June, and the Orphanage of St Joseph became a great boon to the district. This Foundation was followed by one at Genoa in the month of October of the same year.

CHAPTER XXVII

"Volo, quidquid vis; volo quia vis; volo quomodo vis; volo quamdiu vis." ST AUGUSTINE.

"On fait du bien moins par ce qu'on fait, ou dit, que par ce que l'on est." BAUDRILLART.

THE duty of visiting her houses in Italy took the Mother General thither in the spring of 1893; and with what joy she fulfilled that of visiting the one in Rome can be imagined by all who realise what the Eternal City, its past and equally its present, meant to her. Her audience with the Holy Father, Leo XIII, took place on Monday in Holy Week, March 27th. She was accompanied on this occasion by the community of the Assumption of Rome. The nun who describes it says that they knelt in a circle round the Pope, and Mother Marie Eugénie, speaking for the rest, presented him with a little casket, saying: "'Holy Father, I lay at your feet our jubilee offering, and even more the expression of our profound respect, and devotion and filial love.' 'You love the Pope then?' he said. He was answered by a universal chorus of assent. 'And your children love him too?' 'Yes, indeed, and the work dearest to them is collecting Peter's Pence.' 'I bless them,' he answered. 'I bless all. Make them well acquainted with the Church; make them love it. And you, may you always make progress in the spirit of devotedness and sacrifice.'

"We pressed round him, all of us; it was like a Father surrounded by his children. He knew that our Mother was the Superior General, but when we told him she was our Foundress as well, he took her hand and pressed it to his heart, saying with an expression we shall never forget: 'Oh! then we must get

more intimately acquainted! Tell me who you are, your name, your country, your age.' And the Pope, taking hold of our Mother's two hands, leant towards her in order to hear her better. When she said that Metz was her birth place: 'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'Lorraine! the French cannot console themselves for having lost it.' 'It was God's punishment,' our Mother answered, 'for having withdrawn our troops from Rome.'

"Then the Pope told us about his personal experiences of that sad time. He said: 'I was at Civita-Vecchia when the French troops were taking their departure. I noticed that the officers were apparently in great consternation, and I asked them what had happened. They answered: 'We are leaving Rome.' 'You are going to abandon the Pope?' 'Those are our orders.' 'Then,' I said, 'I am sorry for the Pope and his successors, but even more for the man who issued the order. And my prophecy was only too soon verified.'

"The audience lasted for some time. The Holy Father made the Sisters come forward one after another, desiring to know to what nation they belonged, and giving them and their families a special blessing When it came to the turn of a German, 'Oh!' he exclaimed, 'but that means war!' 'No, Holy Father,' was the answer, 'it is always peace at the Assumption.' Leo XIII with a smile, said, looking at our Mother: 'Good, very good, may there be always peace.'

"Then having blessed us all, and blessed our houses and our pupils, he again gave his hand to the Mother General, saying: 'Courage, *ma Mère*, courage; continue your grand work for the education of young girls. It is of the highest importance in these days. Train them to be Christians, to be souls strongly attached to their religion. Go on developing yourselves. Direct your efforts to the end that Jesus

Christ, the Church and the Pope should be loved.' "

The active life of Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus fittingly closed with this interview with the Holy Father. For the three years of life which remained to her were clouded over by an insidious complaint which gradually undermined all her faculties, beginning with her memory and her powers of will, and ending with complete paralysis. Whether she was conscious of the deadly disease in its first approaches we are not told; but it became increasingly visible to those around her; and ere long it had to be faced. The Abbé Odelin took the initiative in the name of the Archbishop of Paris. The General Chapter was to be held in the autumn of 1894 at Auteuil, and before it met, her counsellors judged it advisable to approach the holy Foundress on the subject of her resignation. That it was put before her with all the tact that a profound respect and love could inspire, need scarcely be said; and the answer she made was simply: "Has it come to that?" "Reverend Mother, it is the Archbishop's wish." "Oh, if the Archbishop wishes it, I have nothing more to say. I will ask Mgr de Cabrières to go himself to give my resignation to his Eminence, and to ask him to give me Mother Marie Célestine as Mother Vicar.

"If I hesitated," she said afterwards to M. Marie Marguerite, "it was because I felt I was a link between the various superiors. I feared to cause them pain, and that the union between them would be less close when this link was broken; but my dear Mother Marie Célestine will know well how to rally all hearts to her."

The General Chapter occurred in September, when the touching scene took place of the Foundress, surrounded by her daughters, laying down her charge and all her powers at the wish of her spiritual guides. "*Je n'ai plus qu'à être bonne maintenant*," she said on leaving the Chapter-room.

The last glorious mystery of our Lady, the Assumption, was the one to which Mother Marie Eugénie's eyes and heart had been directed all through her religious life. But it is to the first joyful mystery, the Annunciation, that we must go to learn the meaning of the trial to which God's loving providence subjected her in the concluding three years of that life. The lesson of the Annunciation, according to the Jesuit, Fr. de Régnon, is one which applies to many lives, and it does so in a special manner to hers. "Look at Mary," he said, "contemplate her at the beginning of her life, when the Angel, appearing to her, told her she was to be the Mother of God. What a miracle! What joy linked with such astounding graces! We seem to be transported to heaven. And what is the end? The life of Mary begun at such heights ends in nothingness—oblivion. This, we may safely say, is God's general plan for all. Life begins with large promises, which diminish as it goes on. Our horizon is large, our influence great. Many love us, there are many we love, a vast field opens before us. And how does it all end? *In nothing.* From a human point of view, this is very sad. We suffer; we are crushed to the earth. But it is then that we become Mary's sisters, our Lord's friends; and in our very agony we triumph. Mary soon saw the joys of the Annunciation vanish. We also shall be stripped of human consolations. But what matters it as long as God triumphs in us."

We read in the *Origines* that nothing but words of thanksgiving and resignation rose from Mother Marie Eugénie's lips during these years of trial when she saw everything slipping away from her: facility of speech, of movement, powers of will and memory. Only one thing remained: a profound and loving submission to the will of God. She never ceased to show her high opinion and confidence in her successor and Vicaress, Mother Marie Célestine, and on various occasions

drew attention to the success with which she governed the Congregation. " My Vicaress manages better than I should have done," she was heard to say. And, again, she told Fr. Picard : " I have a Vicaress without an equal."

Many years before Mother Marie Eugénie had offered herself as a willing victim to suffer humiliations and privations of every kind in order " naked to follow her naked Jesus," and thus become more closely united to Him. And we see the same leading idea on a page written by her in 1886. " I look upon the sufferings I have had as a grace of predestination which have enlightened, and I trust purified, my soul ; and I accept the pains which the future will bring, O my Jesus, as a much loved Cross which thou offerest me in order to unite me to thee : *Crux pretiosa, bene amata.* I desire to be absolutely silent in my words and actions about all that concerns my personality, and to seek Thee alone ; to speak of and act for Thee only, so that in all my behaviour to others and my work in the Congregation there should be no question of anyone but Thee, and that I should henceforth be *nothing*, and that nobody should occupy themselves about me."

If there was one virtue more than another which Mother Marie Eugénie displayed during these last years of her life, it was her obedience. She seemed to have been led to the perfect practice of the virtue so dear to God, and one to which she had had a special attraction all her life, in order that she should give an example of its beauty to her daughters, which, up to that time, had been impossible. One who had known her for a great number of years, Dr Malhéné, and who by his devotion to the service of the community had gained a high place in their esteem, said of her : " Your mother is now writing the most beautiful page in her history." Her infirmarian, who recorded some of the salient points of Mother Marie Eugénie's life when she

was under her care, said that it might be summed up in few words : It was made up of prayer and obedience. On one occasion when some new arrangement was made for her comfort, she showed great gratitude for it ; and when the Sister who was attending to her wants said : " Why did you not ask for it before, Mother ? " " Because I have made the resolution never to ask for anything." Her conduct was guided in all things by the Mother Vicar. It was sufficient for her to be told that she wished such and such a thing for her to agree instantly ; and she did not restrict herself to obeying the Superior, she seemed to have resolved to obey all those by whom she was surrounded. Her spirit of prayer was the next great characteristic of the last years of the holy Foundress. The divine Office had been her chief joy and devotion during the whole of her religious life ; and she only gave it up within very few months of her death, when the recitation of it became an effort of which she was physically incapable. Even then she liked to keep her breviary on a table near her, and used to turn over the pages lovingly, reading an antiphon or hymn here and there. The way of the Cross came next to the Divine Office in the list of her devotions. She never omitted this devotion for a single day after she had resigned her office of Superior General. She persevered in making it in the choir as long as her enfeebled limbs could bear her, and long after it was pain and grief for her to drag herself from one station to another. It was only in November 1897, four months before her death, that being unable to leave the infirmary, she made the Stations there with the infirmarians. Later still, when confined to bed, she surrounded herself with fourteen little pictures representing the different mysteries of the Passion, and, crucifix in hand, continued to follow our Lord in spirit to Calvary and to the tomb.

Though the gradual decay of her faculties proceeded steadily, and one by one, her powers of speech, the

movements of her body were all attacked, her mind remained, by the mercy of God, perfectly clear to the end. We read in the *Origines* that the novices loved to visit her and put questions to her, and though she used smilingly to declare that they were her "*petits tourments*," they were always welcome, and their gaiety did her good. On one occasion she said: "I have always noticed that cheerfulness is a great means of sanctification. The characteristic virtue of the Assumption is simplicity, and I love to see it in the novices; they are very gay, which is a help to virtue." One of them asked her once which it was best to be, sweet-tempered or energetic. "To be sweet-tempered one must be energetic," was her answer. "And to be humble must one suffer many humiliations?" "One should be simple and be persuaded that one is nothing."

We have already drawn attention to the fact that the holy Foundress had always taken the greatest interest in the pupils. One of these, on leaving the convent, had asked to take leave of her, and said: "You will pray for me, dear Mother?" "Yes, my child, and I will ask God that you may have the grace of great firmness in your faith." The girl, who was returning to a home that was Christian in little more than name, was struck with the answer: she added: "Do you think that it is possible that I may become a nun?" "That," said Mother Marie Eugénie, "would be a great grace, but it is God's secret." On the 25th of August, 1896, the children assembled to wish her a happy birthday, and she distributed holy pictures amongst them. As she had then great difficulty in speaking, an effort was made to shorten the ceremony, but she protested saying: "I have something to say to them," and turning to the children she said in a weak voice trembling with emotion: "My children, remember all your life long that you have to save your souls: that is the only thing necessary."

On the 9th of October 1897, she had a slight stroke of paralysis. This was followed by another in November, when it was thought that her last hour had come. She rallied, however, and was able on the 9th, the anniversary of the first Mass said at the Assumption, to receive holy Communion seated in an arm-chair. She communicated four times a week from that date till the 13th of February, when she was anointed.

Notwithstanding her ever-increasing debility and difficulty of utterance when she was questioned, her answers showed that her mind did not share in her bodily decay. A Sister asked her: "What should I do during Advent?" "Be very humble so as to attract our Lord to you." "And I," said the Mother Vicaress who was present, "what should I do to sanctify the time of Advent?" Mother Marie Eugénie looked at her tenderly for some minutes, and then answered slowly, overcoming the effort it was to her to get out her words: "What I wish for you is that you should go on doing what you have hitherto done." On Christmas day Fr. Picard came to wish her a happy feast. "I wish you," he said, "all the Christmas joys." "I have had them, Father," was her answer. In the evening, the Mother Vicar asked her if the Infant Jesus had not said beautiful things to her. "Yes! and things impossible for one to repeat."

Mother Marie Eugénie had for companion in the infirmary for some months before her death, a young Irish nun who was dying of consumption. Gay, affectionate, and gentle, Sister Marie Philomène was like a ray of sunshine, we are told, to the holy Mother, brightening her solitude. One day, though she did not appear worse than usual, she seemed to have a presentiment of approaching death, as, after asking the Mother more than once for her blessing, on leaving the room she said: "I shall never return here." A week after she made a holy and peaceful end. Mother Marie Eugénie when told of it said: "My God, may

Thy Will be done!" words which she never failed to say at the death of her daughters. From this time, January 11th, we find in the notes made by her infirmarian: "Our Mother never speaks; she prays incessantly." In the beginning of February, other grave symptoms appeared. Her legs became so swollen that she could no longer walk. On the 13th, the Mother Vicar felt it was time to prepare her to receive the last Sacraments. Fr. Picard gave her Extreme Unction, which she received dressed in her habit and veil, and seated in an arm-chair. The rest of the day she seemed particularly joyous, as if she was living on the recollection of the grace God had given her, and the hope that the gift of God had communicated to her. Mother Marie Célestine, returning to her later in the day, was received by her with a loving look which spoke more eloquently than any words; for she had now lost all power of speech. A member of the community wrote that, going to see her under the impression of what had taken place, she could not suppress a feeling of great sorrow, but that kneeling beside the holy Mother she forgot it, so sensible was the impression of the grace of the sacrament she had received. "Her countenance shone with supernatural brightness; her look, which for some days had been that of a person in whom life was all but extinct, reflected celestial joy and peace. I never saw anything similar. One felt that God was there. He had no doubt revealed to our Mother something of the mystery of eternity in the peace in which He had rapt her soul. Her mouth was dumb and kept the secret of what had passed; but her countenance, her look, more eloquent than any words, showed God's presence in her."

The Holy Father sent her his blessing through Cardinal Parocchi; and Cardinal Richard came to visit and bless her a few days before her death.

On the 7th of March, Mother Marie Eugénie appeared to have entered into her agony; but the

Tomb of Mère Marie Eugénie and
Mère Thérèse Emmanuel.

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following day there was a slight rally, and she was able to receive holy Communion, and, later in the day, she made the Stations of the Cross and prayed fervently, showing perfect consciousness of what she was doing. On the morning of the 9th, a change was visible in her face, and the end was thought to be at hand. The Community were summoned, and prayers said for the dying. As the holy Mother appeared conscious, the Vicar said to her : " Mother, if you think you would still be able to receive our Lord, press my hand." She did so, and the chaplain, escorted by the whole community, brought her the Viaticum. Many superiors of the houses of the Assumption, hearing that her death was imminent, hurried to Auteuil, and remained with her till the end came.

The infirmarians alone were watching with her during the early part of the night after she received Viaticum ; but at two in the morning, they saw a change come over her. All her daughters were summoned and surrounded by them on their knees, praying and weeping beside her. Without a movement or a sigh, the holy Mother gave up her soul to God.

The Mother Vicar issued the following circular to all the Sisters of the Congregation on the 10th of March. " This morning's telegram will have told you that our beloved Mother has gone to heaven. Her end was calm, grand and dignified, as befitted her soul. Thus indeed should be the death of a Foundress ! Though we had not the consolation of hearing her voice, her whole existence was a lesson to us to the last. Her habitual submission of soul to the divine Will of God showed itself in the way she faced death ; not a movement, not a contraction betrayed any desire except to submit to Him. Never was there a more peaceful end. We were all surrounding her, praying with all the fervour that filial piety inspires ; and if our eyes had not been fixed on her beloved

features, we should never have caught the sound of her last sigh, so gently did her soul surrender itself to the call of the divine Spouse. Though our hearts were torn, we had a feeling of peace and calm which seemed to spread all round her. We were in a sanctuary where the meeting between the soul of our Mother and God had taken place, and we felt in our inmost heart the deep significance that this meeting bore for her and for us. . . . She will never forget us whom she has left orphans; she will be more than ever a mother to us, now that she is united to Him who is the eternal Love. Her visible presence will alone be wanting; for can one hesitate to believe that she will remain with us and watch over us invisibly?"

The mortal remains of Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus were laid out in the Convent parlour, which was transformed for the occasion into a *chapelle ardente*. The open coffin allowed people to look for the last time on her face, to which death had given an expression of majesty in addition to her habitual one of peace and serenity. Many came to pray beside it, both to pray for her soul and to invoke her assistance for their spiritual and temporal wants, with that loving confidence which is felt by God's children that He will never despise the petitions of His servants whose deaths are precious in His sight. We read in the *Fondatrice* that the holy Foundress was spontaneously honoured from the time of her death with a devotion which bore testimony of the general opinion of the eminence of her virtues. People brought their rosaries and medals in order to touch the body with them, and kissed her hands and feet, which still retained their flexibility.

The funeral, at which the Cardinal Archbishop of Rheims and an immense number of priests and members of religious Orders, as well as the former pupils of the Congregation, assisted, took place on the 12th of March 1898. She was buried in the mortuary chapel at Auteuil, beside the body of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel.

Val Notre-Dame (Belgium), Present Mother House.

Val Notre-Dame.

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EPILOGUE

Words spoken by Mère Marie Eugénie in 1884, on the anniversary of the Foundation :

" Looking back upon the first days of the foundation and seeing all Our Lord has done for us, I am struck by a thought which I should like to share with you. It is that everything in our Institute comes from Jesus Christ, belongs to Jesus Christ and ought to be for Jesus Christ.

" *All comes from Jesus Christ.*—Was there any one but Him who called us, who had the full knowledge of what we were to be ? No one. Neither the priest who, at the shrine of Ste. Anne d'Auray believed that there had been communicated to him a desire of our Blessed Lady's to see a religious congregation founded in honour of her Assumption ; nor those labourers of the first hour whose great merit was to give themselves up without reserve to designs as yet unknown.

" How can we account for the development of our spirit, that greatest of all our treasures, which we all recognise as characteristic of our Institute : first of all, Jesus Christ, the King of Eternity, living in souls and living in His Church ; the spread of His kingdom within us and without ; a great spirit of prayer depending partly on the Divine Office, where we find examples of the Saints and the devotions of the Church, partly on the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where, with Jesus Christ Himself, we enter into four ends of His Divine Sacrifice ; the rosary which I so often see you saying during the day ; the Way of the Cross which so many of you find time to make as well ; then a certain liberty of spirit which leaves to each one her supernatural individuality ; the eagerness which should make us practise virtue, not by constraint

from without, but by an inward loyalty which of itself seeks obedience, poverty, humility, regularity, patience, mortification, for the sake of pleasing Jesus Christ and following Him, so that we would not willingly be surpassed in these virtues by any other Order, while keeping to what is compatible with our work and our Rule.

"Who in those far-off days foresaw the spirit of sisterly affection, full of deference and sincerity, a certain kinship of spirit with the old monastic Orders which has its influence on the education we give our children? Who knew we should have the Divine Office and the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in so many of our chapels? Only Our Lord, and it is under His guidance that all these things have been made clear to us, little by little, by the formulation of rules, by the growing up of customs, by the graces given to us, by the Sisters God has sent us, by the advice and the virtues of those with whom He has placed us in contact. Everything then comes from Jesus Christ.

"*All belongs to Jesus Christ.*—Possessions, houses, all that we have in this world is not ours; we began in a poor little flat, then in rented houses, we were a few girls living together without resources, without a place we could call our own. Convents and gardens, schools and chapels, have all come to us from the gift of God. Should we be attached to these things and consider them as our own? Ought we not rather to recognise that we belong to Jesus Christ, and that these things also belong to Him? He has given them to us—they are His and it is in His service that we use them.

"*Let everything then be for Jesus Christ.*—The supreme attraction by which God draws souls is the gift of Himself, the wondrous gift of the Incarnation, the self-surrender, the poverty and helplessness of the Holy Childhood, the very preaching of the Gospel is

the gift of truth and salvation until Jesus Christ give Himself even more completely in the Blessed Sacrament and on the Cross—there has been His call to us in the beauty of His gift, His love, His self-surrender, His generosity. Could He have called us to anything else but to give ourselves to Him as He has given Himself to us. What will be the form our life will take? Will He make us apostles, working for the coming of His kingdom far and near, or victims sharing His Cross by physical suffering? Whatever our life may be, what He expects of us is an utter self-surrender, so that having received all from Jesus Christ, all that we are may belong to Him, to be used by Him and for Him."

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